CULTURAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS IN CONRAD'S MAJOR NOVELS

ABSTRACT

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

IN

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BY

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Under the supervision of

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A B S T R A C T

Joseph Conrad has traditionally been regarded as a 'Sea-dreamer' and a spinner of exotic yarns. This reputation persisted till the first half of this century. In recent times, however, there have been attempts to reclaim Conrad from the stereotyped rubrics and restore him to his proper position. The socio-political and cultural aspects of his works are being explored and analysed. But to dub Conrad as a writer of political novels as the genre has developed now and to see him through the same critical stance as we may apply in case of some modern novelists like George Orwell, Arthur Koestler, Milan Kundera etc. would be erroneous. Conrad was not a believer in any particular political ideology and the political and cultural implications in his works are not explicit but implicit and must be taken in their proper perspective to bring out their real significance in the over-all scheme of Conradian values. The present thesis is an attempt in this direction.

Chapter I traces Conrad's background -- historical and political and attempts to bring out the significance of certain historical and biographical facts for an appropriate assessment of his works. It also discusses the cultural and political imperatives that largely shaped his perspective. Conrad was born and brought up in a Poland rent asunder by Russian oppression. Later in life, he

became a British citizen. Thus, from the member of a colonised community, he became the citizen of a colonising country. This provided him with sufficient knowledge of both sides of the fence. It is this vantage point that enabled him to reject Polish Romanticism as the idealism of the foolhardy, to seriously question English and Swiss democracies for allowing inefficiency and mob-rule and to adopt a sceptical attitude towards all forms of popular revolt.

Chapter II is devoted to an assessment of Conrad's first two novels,- Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands. These works have received little attention from critics. Although the political and cultural implications in these novels have a spirit of tentativeness and may, at times, seem a carry over of the stereotypes supplied by colonial fictions, they are important inasmuch as they clearly foreshadow some of the dominant themes, attitudes and characters dealt with in his major novels. Almayer's Folly deals with the story of the Dutchman Almayer who marries a native woman. An analysis has been made of the racial tensions that vitiate their 'mixed' marriage and of the prolonged and traumatic identity crisis of their daughter Nina who eventually casts her fate with Dain Maroola, the native prince. An Outcast of the Islands is an inverse sequel of the same story. The central characters are Willems

and Aissa who are irresistibly drawn to each other. But their love cannot trnscend the barriers of culture. It has been shown how the sporadic incursions of European powers on the native societies resulted in political and cultural disorientation of native people.

The long story "An Outpost of Progress" and the novella Heart of Darkness have been discussed in Chapter III. "An Outpost" has been treated as a sort of prelude to Heart of Darkness. The central characters in the story -- Kayerts and Carlier may reasonably be regarded as the forerunners of Kurtz, the hollowman. The story brings out the unhealthy implications of petty trading on the fringes of the Empire. The same implications have received extensive treatment in the discussion of Heart of Darkness. The richness and complexity of the political and cultural meanings have been discussed in details; of course, the metaphysical dimension has not been totally eschewed. The hypocrisy and megalomania that lay behind the ostensible philanthropic mission of the Europeans have been exposed. It has been pointed out how the Europeans destroyed the traditional social structure without replacing it by an alternative order. This made a whole community of people aliens in their own land.

Chapter IV discusses Nostromo which is arguably Conrad's most complex exegesis of the cultural and political

fate of nations in underdeveloped and developing countries. Conrad anticipates prophetically the role of economic imperialism and the kind of politics it would breed. Charles Gould and his wife Emilia reopen the San Tome silver mine with the help of American investment. They start with the assumption that the well-being of the people is not only related to but a natural concomitant of the material prosperity that will emanate from the silver mine. But Costaguana is politically unstable. Political regimes change with astonishing rapidity. This entails shifting of loyalties by politicians and generals, all in the name of liberty and democracy though in fact to achieve personal power and wealth. The native culture in Costaguana was in a fluid state and could not develop any mature or comprehensive political sense and an appreciation of the national problems around which debates could take place. The inevitable result is a brand of politics brazenly opportunistic. The regimes change but the acquisitive and predatory instincts persist.

Chapter V discusses The Secret Agent which registers Conrad's excursion into unexplored terrains. The world of The Secret Agent is one of terrorism, anarchism, espionage and doublecross. The central character is the secret agent Verloc who is, in fact, a double agent. He

is an anarchist as well as a police informer. He maintains a precarious existence by fostering radical activities as well as generating reactionary fears. This paradox of order fails when Verloc makes a go at the Greenwich Observatory at the incitement of Vladimir and about which he could not possibly inform Heat, the police Inspector. Attention has been focussed on Conrad's remarkable insights into the real motives of anarchists and how they worked. Conrad's portrayal of the anarchists as a bunch of ineffectual people reinforces the impotence of anarchism as a political movement. It has been shown how the seemingly just and democratic social order of England harboured deep injustice and exploitation of the poor. The vision presented by the novel is a deeply pessimistic one because of the total absence of any kind of social commitment by any character.

Chapter VI discusses Under Western Eyes that marks the culmination of Conrad's mature thinking on a number of issues -- political, cultural and metaphysical. Since it is a story about Russia's political and cultural past and Slav psychology, Conrad's special relationship with Russia has been examined in the beginning. The story revolves around Razumov, who, although cultivates studied neutrality and non-involvement, gets implicated in the discontent raging around him against Tsarist despotism. Haldin, a

fellow student and the assassin of Mr. de P takes refuge in Razumov's room and thus implicates him. Though Razumov betrays Haldin to police through his putative father, Prince K, he cannot get back his former freedom. An analysis has been made of the inexorable nature of politics in Russia during Conrad's time. Both the police and the revolutionists try to exploit Razumov against each other. Unable to fulfil any of his assumed roles, Razumov, consumed with anguish and remorse, confesses before the revolutionists and rendered a cripple by them. The tyranny and brutality of senseless despotism, the schizophrenia of Russian politics and life in Russia during the pre-revolutionary era have been critically examined. In the course of discussion it has been pointed out how the Russian and the Western world have been conceived as two cultural counterpoints, mutually antagonistic and irreconcilabe.

Chapter VII concludes the thesis by summarising the findings in the earlier chapters and giving a resume of the preceding treatment. Conrad was luckier than many other writers in that his books received comprehensive critical attention both during his lifetime and afterwards. His essentially modern imagination that accepts the validity of irreconcilable attitudes, his ideas about the inexorable nature of politics, the historical and cultural determination of people living in a particular society etc. will continue to have their relevance and challenge the critical mind over a long period of time to come.

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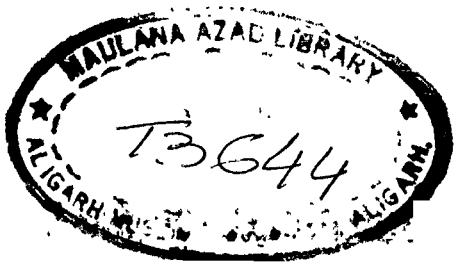

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(Mohd. Asaduddin)

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PREFACE

Joseph Conrad has traditionally been regarded as a romantic, a sea-dreamer and a writer of exotic tales. The socio-political and cultural aspects of his works, though acknowledged by scholars, have been ignored by critics over the years. In recent times, however, attempts to release Conrad from the old strait-jacket and to designate him as a writer of political novels have resulted in misplaced over-emphasis and simplification. To dub Conrad as a writer of political novels and to see him through the same critical stance as we may apply in case of some modern novelists, for instance, George Orwell, Arthur Koestler, Milan Kundera etc. , will be erroneous. Obviously, overtones of political and cultural interactions are not explicit, but implicit in his works. The political and cultural dimensions are embedded into the very structure of some of his major novels and it requires a thorough probe to get into the real nature of those dimensions. This important aspect in Conrad requires adequate and comprehensive exploration.

Gustav Morf's The Polish Heritage Of Joseph Conrad (1930) sees Conrad as a repressed revolutionary and considers his fiction as the record of his struggle with

revolutionary tendencies. More recently Irving Howe, in Politics and the Novel(1957), almost restated the 'Morf Thesis' holding, with a commitment to the left, Conrad's writing to be an allegory of his desertion of the Polish independence movement. This has been followed in the sixties by Eloise Knapp Hay's The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad (1963). Mrs. Hay endeavours to instil in the reader's mind a sense of Conrad's ideal of social cohesion. In his scholarly study, Conrad's Politics : Community and Anarchy in the Novels of Joseph Conrad (1967), Avrom Fleishman propounds the thesis that Conrad's works invariably project his appreciation for organic community as opposed to anarchy. He links Conrad with the tradition of Organicist thought and tries to fit him within its general principles.

The complex nature of Conrad's works makes it difficult to classify him into any of the readily available categories. The cultural and political implications of his novels continue to tantalise and challenge critical minds. They seem to abide our question and yet magnificently transcend our grasp. They are sufficiently subtle to leave any interpretation of them as doctrinal statements expressing some coherent system of political thought and cultural movement. In other words, his works

are not reducible to any political or cultural ideology. Besides, Conrad had a special genius for positing irreconcilable attitudes and leave them without any final resolution. Any study of Conrad to be fruitful must take cognisance of the validity of the irreconcilable points of view in Conrad.

In my enquiry of Conrad I have tried to examine his literary texts in the context of relevant historical, political and biographical facts. However that does not mean that I have adopted a biographical or historical approach and tried to read literature as history or biography. I have taken utmost care to avoid the pitfalls inherent in the extremes of any particular approach. In other words, my study envisages an aggregation of all the available approaches,- what has come to be known as the inter-disciplinary approach in modern critical jargon. Aesthetic considerations and imaginative aspects have nowhere been given the short shrift.

While it is very difficult for me to enumerate the names of critics and biographers who have been of great help, I wish in particular, to register my debt to Richard Curle, F.R. Leavis, Douglas Hewitt, Avrom Fleishman and Jocelyn Baines. References to Conrad's works, unless otherwise mentioned, are to the Dent Uniform Edition, published from 1921 onwards.

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Chapter-I

INTRODUCTION

C H A P T E R - I

INTRODUCTION

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Joseph Conrad occupies an important place in the galaxy of modern novelists. Though a writer of uncommon merit, he was not a 'popular' novelist. He was a Pole by birth and inspite of being the inhabitant of a land-locked country he showed great fascination for the sea. He was the most prominent among the few expatriate writers in the world who attained fame by writing in a foreign language. The son of a life-long rebel, Joseph Conrad was quite a different man from his father. The father, Apollo Korzeniowski was an arch-radical sacrificing his life, family and property at the altar of Polish freedom. But the son had a profoundly conservative streak in his outlook. Nevertheless, throughout his life Joseph Conrad himself was a sympathiser of the

Polish cause and he condemned Russian autocracy bitterly and vehemently. Living far away from the land of his birth he never failed to react sharply in moments of its political and cultural crises. Though not actively involved in the struggle of the Poles, he served the cause in his own way.

Conrad's reputation as a writer, at least for the first half of this century, rested chiefly on his sea-tales and exotic yarns. In the popular mind he was thought to be primarily a dabbler in exoticism. Conrad himself was upset being labelled in this way. In his letters and essays, he tried to dispel the impression that he was merely a 'Sea-dreamer' or a spinner of exotic yarns, but without much success. In one of his letters to Sidney Colvin, Conrad complained quite late in life :"I may say that I have not been very well understood. I have been called a writer of the sea, of the tropics, a descriptive writer, a romantic writer -- and also a realist. But as a matter of fact all my concern has been with the 'ideal value' of things, events and people".[1]

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[1] G. Jean Aubry, Joseph Conrad:Life and Letters II (London:William Heineman,Ltd.,1927), p.1. Subsequent references are to this edition.

But in recent years Conrad has been reclaimed from the shackles of stereotyped rubrics and attempts are being made to throw light on other significant aspects of his novels and discover their social, political and cultural dimensions.

It is said that great writers create mostly out of their own personal experiences over which an extraordinarily fertile imagination works. Their lives provide them with the warp and woof out of which they create masterpieces of art. This could not be more true in the case of Conrad. The circumstances of his life in a way fashioned the direction of his career as a writer and it may be said almost with certainty that his books would have been different if he were not a sailor and a Polish emigree. Besides, unlike other contemporary writers like Kipling, Haggard, Henley and Stevenson who wrote about the experiences on the fringes of the Empire, Conrad lived both as a native of a colonised country and as a member of a colonising community. So he could achieve a comprehensiveness in his outlook and attitude which they rarely did. It is for these reasons that his art is intimately related to his biography and the dominant political and cultural tendencies of the day which

are important sources for the study and appreciation of Conrad.

As pointed out above, to grasp the cultural and political dimensions in Joseph Conrad's works, it is important to study some aspects of his life, family background and his early impressions. We must, however, resist all attempts to reduce the significance of his works to their causal or biographical origins. Joseph Conrad was born at Berdichew in Ukraine, then a part of Russia, on Dec. 3, 1857. He was born in a family of patriots from the sides of both his father and mother. His father's family appear to have been Utopian dreamers, given to passionate involvement in hopeless political adventures. His grandfather was a fiery patriot ever ready to take horse and drive invaders from his beloved Polish soil. His mother's family, the Bobrowskis, appreciated the more conventional and practical virtues. Apollo Korzeniowski, Conrad's father, was a man of genius but full of conflicts and contradictions. An active rebel against Russian oppression in Poland, he was an idealist in political matters, a romantic, a poet, a translator and a playwright of some gifts. He was a witness to the forces of division and disintegration

of his country -- a Poland which was divided in three successive stages -- in 1772, 1793 and 1795 among Russia, Prussia and Austria. Thus Poland as a geographical entity did not exist. But the physical division of the country led to its spiritual unification and a regular and sustained national movement grew up. Baby Conrad breathed the atmosphere of tension, idealism and struggle in which his father was actively involved.

The history of Poland witnessed by Conrad was a history of its successive divisions by imperial powers and a policy of unrelieved suppression by the Victorious Powers. In 1793, in the second of the three partitions that cost Poland her autonomy, Ukraine was turned over to imperial Russia. In the third and final partition of Poland which took place in 1795, Russia grabbed the major portion of Poland. From then on the Russian government became more oppressive and the Polish people turned particularly hostile to Russia. In 1829, there was a popular uprising against Russia in which Teodor Korzeniowski, the grandfather of Joseph Conrad, along with other political leaders, raised an army of about 80,000 men. The outbreak took the form of a war and lasted for eight months. But

eventually Poland could not cope up with the mighty power of Russia and suffered defeat. The defeat was also partly due to the flagrant inequality in Polish society with its group conflicts and internal dissensions.

The suppression of the insurrection led to widespread repressive measures. Russia calculatedly set out to destroy the identity of Poland. Censorship, conscription, restriction against Roman Catholics, dispersion of the Polish soldiers into the Russian army -- all these followed the great defeat of 1830-31. To avoid Russian oppression and compulsory conscription into the Russian army, the Poles started migrating to the neighbouring countries. Yet paradoxically, the Russians in their impatience to stamp out Polish nationality only intensified it. As Russia was going ahead with its measures of repression, Poland prepared for another round of insurrections. Jocelyn Baines has captured the mood of the patriotic Poles when he observed :"As to political activity, it was almost inevitable for any patriotic Pole to become involved in this as long as the nation was forcibly divided and dominated by foreign powers."[2]

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[2] Jocelyn Baines, Joseph Conrad:A Critical Biography (London:Wiedenfield and Nicobon,1959), p.7.

During the Crimean war, with Russia occupied with England and Turkey, Polish hope rose again. Apollo himself was stirred to action and organised the peasants of Podolia and Ukraine. They put up a brave fight but that was all. Once again Poland's agonies failed to strike a sympathetic cord in the minds of European powers and its fortune became marginal to more important matters in the Treaty of Paris. Poland was, as it were, destined to remain yoked to great powers. Conrad voices the same sentiment of Poland's fate as a loser when he writes to Garnett :

> You remember always that I am a Slav (it's your idee fixe) but you seem to forget that I am a Pole. You forget that we have been used to go to battles without illusions. It's you Britishers that "go in to win" only. We have been "going in" these last hundred years repeatedly, to be knocked on the head only[3]- as was visible to any calm intellect.

Apollo left his estate at Berdichew and went to Zhitomir, a short distance off. He wished to turn his literary gifts to some profit. But along with his literary interest, he immersed himself in the outbursts of anger, clandestine plotting and counter-plotting. By this time his attention was drawn to Warsaw which had turned into a hotbed of radical activity

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[3] G.Jean Aubry, Life and Letters II, p.59.

and groups of revolutionary youths and patriots moved into the city to participate in some kind of underground activities. In May 1861, Apollo reached Warsaw with the ostensible purpose of starting a literary paper to be called Fortnightly Review. His activities culminated in the unfortunate insurrection that broke out in Warsaw on January 22, 1863, in which ironically enough, Apollo could not take part as he had already been arrested three months before. Apollo was charged with a broad range of crimes and his wife was also co-accused at the military tribunal. He was sentenced to exile to a distant Russian province Vologda and his wife Ewa also decided to accompany him.

Ewa's determination to accompany her husband in his exile and confinement was a crucial decision that had profound impact on Conrad's life. He had to grow up in an atmosphere of despair, disease and claustrophobia. Matters of poor health, of waning energies, of constant illness seemed to have become an indelible part of Conrad's early memories and even in his later life, the events of his early life continued to cast their long shadows. As Frederick Karl points out :

Conrad's psychological expectations were

> set at this time. He had discovered a frame of reference in which illness created a number of responses and fulfilled a variety of needs, not the least of which was its utilisation as an attention-getting device.[4]

Ewa breathed her last on April 6, 1865. After her death Conrad was thrown into a life deprived of his mother and in the company of a father already ill and often sunk in gloomy silence. He had none to talk to, no children to play with and the tension in the atmosphere that had surrounded him from his birth reached its limit. The circumstances of his life brought home to him ideas that rarely come to the children of his age -- ideas of death, liberty and love that were to colour his thoughts for the years to come.

The painful isolation that the boy Conrad was thrown into had had far-reaching implications. Being totally shut out from the external world and being deprived of any sympathetic channel of communication, his eyes turned inward :" I don't know what would have become of me if I had not been a reading boy,"[5] muses Conrad in his A Personal Record, and in most of

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[4] Frederick R. Karl, Joseph Conrad:The Three Lives (London:Faber and Faber,1979), p.47.

[5] Joseph Conrad, A Personal Record (J.M. Dent & Sons. Ltd.,1923), p.

his novels we find long, brooding passages of introspection. The question of isolation and alienation -- physical and psychological, occupies him in most of his novels. In Almayer's Folly, we find it in Nina's case; in An Outcast of the Islands, it is found in case of Willems; in Kurtz in Heart of Darkness; in Lord Jim in the novel of that name; in Razumov of Under Western Eyes, to mention only the most conspicuous cases. Indeed, the memory of the days spent with his father in exile and confinement seemed to have become so deep-seated that we find him constantly exploring parent-child relationships with reference to their cultural and political environments.

The sorrows and sufferings of his boyhood, the continuous tension and uncertainty had also some positive effects and they had a creative influence on his life and thoughts as a novelist. Destined to lead a marginal life as a boy, he enacted the same role of marginality throughout his life. As a seaman he opted for a separate world, a microcosm with its own discipline, its own value-system. As a writer also, he subjected himself to the same marginality, first, because of the extremely uncertain nature of his profession and second, because of his choice

of a limited circle of friends and acquaintances. Forced into a life of illness, disillusionment and frustration, he evolved his own attitude towards life and its different aspects. He had had a world of experience from which he churned out a few ideals for himself which, according to him, imparted to his life a certain meaning. These ideals are -- the principles of fidelity, liberty and loyalty. He had been adequately schooled on the crucible of these ideals. Later in life he was to declare :

> Those who read me know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a few very simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably among others, on the idea of fidelity.[6]

His experience with his father must have also made some deep impressions in his mind about the processes of the struggle against oppression and despotism and deepened his political insight. The futility of all the noble ideals which his parents aspired to and the lesson borne by their moral and physical disintegration could not have been lost on him. He became painfully aware of the fact that

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[6] Joseph Conrad, 'A Familiar Preface', A Personal Record, p.XXI.

individuals do not carve out their destiny; they are subject to circumstances -- circumstances that are set and defined by the nature and limitations of the omnipotent state and the cultural and political enlightenment of the people. Conrad's major novels leave no doubt that he considered human identity to be a social construction and that the individual's life has its real basis in the political nature and cultural maturity of the community of which the individual is a part. Moreover, his intense personal experiences with the forces of oppression and despotism enriched his sensibility and helped him to reach a vantage point from which he could judge things wisely and dispassionately. It is from this vantage point that he located the failure of the Polish people to their "political immaturity" much as the failure of the people of Costaguana in Nostromo. If we keep these factors in view, Conrad's later shying away from active politics does not seem so paradoxical as some Conrad scholars tend to feel. In fact one critic seems to have come closer to the truth when he points out :

> One reason why Conrad eschewed politics in later life was his awareness of its

> destructive powers: first it seduces and then it discards, having in the process distorted truth and thwarted hope. If he glanced backward, he could note only national disaster and personal tragedy.[7]

From his birth till the death of his father, Conrad was the victim of a situation which was determined by the political conditions of Poland and the convictions and commitment of his parents. He was absolutely alien to the usual life of a boy of his age. His experiences were also very intense and unusual. He became an introvert -- excitable, irascible and taciturn and remained so throughout his life. He also, slowly and gradually, became a sceptic having no great reverence for religion or the comforting certitudes offered by any ideology -- political, cultural and metaphysical. Referring to the time immediately before his father's death, Conrad wrote in his essay 'Poland Revisited' :

> I looked forward to what was coming with an incredulous terror. I turned my eyes from it sometimes with success, and yet all the time I had an awful sensation of the inevitable. I had also moments of revolt which stripped off me some of my simple trust in the government of the universe.[8]

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[7] Frederick R. Karl, Joseph Conrad:The Three Lives, p.57.

[8] Joseph Conrad, 'Poland Revisited', Notes on Life and Letters(London:J.M.Dent & Sons Ltd.,1926), p.168.

All his writings are permeated by a pervasive sense of scepticism. It is this attitude that made him reject Polish Romanticism as the idealism of the foolhardy and seriously question English and Swiss democracies for allowing individual slackness and mob rule. "In between, where Conrad tried to locate himself, was the quicksand of illusions, belief in self, the existential choice of variety, a sense of professionalism and individual commitment."[9]

The cultural aspects of Conrad's works have received little attention so far. Yet he was a writer intensely preoccupied with questions of cultural heritage and cultural crises. As a wanderer among cultures, Conrad has his aesthetic descendents in writers like Graham Greene and V.S. Naipaul, both of whom expressed their debt to him in unqualified terms. As an expatriate writer, Conrad had to discover his moorings in England much as V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie and a host of others are doing today. But right up to the end of his life, he could not integrate himself fully to the English society. The tension in his mind became all the more acute when

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[9] Frederick R. Karl, Joseph Conrad:The Three Lives, p.11.

fellow writers and critics dubbed him as a Slav who brought to bear on his art a peculiarly Slav potentiality of analysing the intricacies of the human mind. Dostoevsky, whom he loathed, was referred to as his literary predecessor. This occasioned several unusually sharp denials from Conrad in his letters and auto-biographical writings. He vehemently denied being a Slav and the culture of Poland being a Slav culture. It is significant to note that quite a few of his novels deal with the dichotomy and tension between different cultures -- Western and Eastern, Slav and European.

Conrad was born and brought up in a Poland rent with political and cultural schism. The victorious powers wanted to impose their own language and culture on the Polish people. The Polish language and culture were tainted insufferably by this intrusion of alien elements. The total Russification of Poland was undertaken successively by a number of Tsars and in most cases, the slight resistance on the part of the Polish people brought in its wake measures of suppression and oppression by the despotic emperors. Later in life, Conrad found the same forces of oppression and suppression operating, albeit in

different forms, in the Far East, Africa and Latin America. In his imagination the fate of Poland became a parable of the political and economic exploitation and cultural denudation of native people by conquering races in a large part of the world. The European colonists and conquerors went to the Far East and Africa for the purposes of trade and establishing colonies. They came in contact with the native societies and native cultures in different ca capacities. Through this contact and intermingling, the primitive cultures of the native communities underwent significant changes. The Europeans influenced the natives a great deal and were, in turn, influenced by them. This brought about a phenomenon of curious cultural interaction.

For a writer, Conrad's background and upbringing were unique. He had been exposed to a broad spectrum of beliefs, intellectual currents and cross-currents of the time. During his stay in France and later in the service of the British Merchant Navy in the Far East and in Congo, he moved among people of different shades of opinion and entered into their activities, not for ideological reasons (as he makes abundantly clear in The Arrow of Gold) but for the sake

of experience itself. His maritime career which led him to distant seas and continents provided him with an excellent opportunity to establish some direct acquaintance with the mode of life of the people of those lands. He could observe from close quarters how the different political ideologies -- imperialism, colonialism and democracy are practiced and the cultural task of civilising native people are carried out. Eventually when he became a writer he could safely draw on his heavily-stored repertoire of observations and experiences which, no doubt, were adequately supplemented by assiduous study of those lands and people.

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Chapter-II

THE FAR EAST

C H A P T E R - II

CONRAD'S ATTITUDE TO THE COLONIAL AND IMPERIAL WEST

A STUDY OF ALMAYER'S FOLLY AND AN OUTCAST OF THE ISLANDS

The "Orient" always held a fascination for Conrad, the sailor and the writer. The Eastern sea, the tropical nature and the native races left a permanent imprint on his mind. He beheld the East in all its manifestations with the curiosity of a man eager for wonders and tried to grasp the mystery the Eastern world was for him. By the time he embarked on his literary career, he had direct experience of several European countries -- for example, Poland, France, Russia, Spain and Great Britain; but it was his experience of a land in the Far East, Borneo, that fired his imagination and spurred him on to creativity. Thus we have works of exotic beauty and aesthetic significance such as Almayer's Folly, An Outcast of the Islands, The Nigger of the Narcissus, Tales of Unrest,

Lord Jim, Youth, Rescue etc., -- works which take their inspiration and sustenance from the life of the people in the Far East. They not only established a rapport between "the British public and the British sailors abroad and at home and the Eurasian and native flotsam and jetsam in eastern seas, but a bridge between the British and the Continental spirit."[1]

The Malayan Archipelago which furnishes the background of Conrad's eastern novels and short stories had witnessed for the last four or five centuries, scenes of intense rivalry and frantic activities relating to colonialism and trade among various European powers. Exaggerated accounts of the 'sweet riches of Borneo' reached the ears of the early Dutch, Portuguese and English voyagers and they regarded it as the Eldorado of the Eastern Archipelago. However, the Spaniards were the first Europeans to visit Borneo (then called Bruni) in 1521. The Portuguese followed them in 1526 and from 1530 they kept themselves in touch with Borneo from Malacca which the great Alfonso d' Albuquerque had conquered in 1511 until they were expelled from that place by the Dutch in 1641. The rise of Great Britain as a political power

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[1] Edward Garnett, ed., Conrad's Prefaces to His Works (London: J.M.Dent & Sons Ltd., 1937), p.4.

in the Malayan Peninsula commenced only during the later half of the Eighteenth century. The first English voyage to this part is, however, shrouded in obscurity.

Conrad's first voyage to the Far East took place in the year 1883. He landed at Singapur after the wreckage of the bark Palestine (Youth). But his stay was quite short. On 22nd Sept.,1885, Conrad arrived at Singapore on board Tilkhurst. This visit had been the longest, and, in terms of his works, the most significant, extending in all from July 1, 1887 to March 3, 1888, a period of eight months. As the second mate of S.S. Vidar he plied extensively among those stations and ports which figure prominently in his works. S.S. Vidar was registered at Benjarmassin, one of the chief ports of Dutch Borneo. Her course was to sail from Singapore through the Carimata strait, from South Borneo to Benjarmassin, then between Isle of Pulo Laut and the east of Borneo. Conrad made five or six voyages between Singapore and Bulangan in Borneo, the place to which he gave the name Sambir in Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands. Its river Berau he christened 'Pantai'.[2]

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[2] Norman Sherry, Conrad's Eastern World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1971), p.119.

It is during this time that he met Olmeijir, Tom Lingard and Syed Abdullah and gathered information about other charactwers who figure in his fiction. On board the Vidar Captain Craig, James Allen and John C. Niven in particular, were able to supply him with the antecedents of these people. Indeed, were it not for his experience of the Malay Archipelago, Conrad may not have become a writer at all. In his A Personal Record, he says categorically : "If I had not got to know Almayer pretty well it is almost certain there would never have been a line of mine in print."[3]

Conrad's life in the Malayan Peninsula has been laid bare to us through the pioneering works of J.D. Gordan[4] and Norman Sherry.[5] Yet these works are purely investigative. The writers set before themselves the task of finding out the originals or derivatives of Conrad's personae. They also most assiduously tried to identify the barks or ships in which

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[3] Joseph Conrad, A Personal Record, p.87.

[4] J.D. Gordan, Joseph Conrad:The Making of a Novelist, (Cambridge, Mass.,1940).

[5] Norman Sherry, Conrad's Eastern World, (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press,1966).

Conrad undertook his voyages, the exact location and route of these voyages on ships and his temporary stay at ports. These books have merits of their own but they tell us very little about life in the Far East. They are not very illuminating when it comes to an enquiry into the cultural and political conditions prevailing in the regions at that time. That was an extremely crucial time for both the Europeans and the natives and enormous changes were taking place in the primitive societies as a result of their exposure to Western political and cultural ideas.

Yet Conrad chose the life in the East not just because of its exotic appeal or to lend enchantment to his subject. These factors might have contributed to his choice, but they are only peripheral. He approached the East as a place testing human character. Conrad was always preoccupied with human nature and human values. By exposing his characters to a set of values or ideologies, he tries to explore their responses and reactions to those values in his novels and stories. They are essentially studies in human nature in particular political and cultural environments. Values are set side by side for the

purposes of contrast and comparison. We find a fine juxtaposition of the values a Westerner lives by and those a native aspires to. They hardly intersect. As a matter of fact, they are in most cases antagonistic to each other. Even then, man cannot remain an island unto himself. He needs communication -- be it for the purposes of profit or philanthropy. This necessity of communication among various racial and cultural groups resulted in social, political, cultural and linguistic interactions. Conrad's Malayan novels attempt to present these interactions in varying dimensions.

Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands - Conrad's first two novels should be considered together, because both of them constitute a single story. Almayer's Folly (the first novel in composition though second in terms of fictive chronology) picks up the thread from where An Outcast ends. Both the novels illustrate and highlight the drama of racial incompatibility. Both hold up for discussion the discrepancy between the 'civilised' and the 'savage' humanity, the clash between cultures resulting in the psychological tensions of the main characters. The Europeans and the natives, their impressions and

reactions,,are studied against the background of their peculiar socio-political surroundings.

Conrad explodes the prevalent myth of 'white superiority' in the 'Author's Note' to Almayer's Folly. It shocks him how the 'civilised' Europeans gave currency to the theory of the 'Whiteman's burden' which was, in fact, the Blackman's or the Brownman's burden. There are no basic differences, he contends, between Europeans and 'that humanity so far away' :

> I am content to sympathise with common mortals, no matter where they live; in houses or in tents, in the streets under a fog, or in the forests behind the dark line of dismal mangroves that fringe the vast solitude of the sea.[6]

This anticipates, however indirectly, Conrad's debunking of the storeotypes of native races prevalent in European societies leading to a more meaningful communication between communities and races. It is this concern with human solidarity, this interest in the possibility of improving human relationship through the exposure of popular myths which seems to be the disguised social project (if they have any) of some of his early novels.

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[6] Joseph Conrad, Almayer's Folly (London and Toronto:J.M.Dent & Sons Ltd.,1923), p.X. All references are to this edition.

The major thrust of Almayer's Folly concerns the racial incompatibility between the Europeans and the natives. The narrator has skilfully dramatised the conflict between cultures that led to tension, isolation and betrayal. The cultural and political themes merge with each other and are woven into the structure of the story of Lingard, Kasper Almayer and his wife, Nina and her lover Dain Maroola. The novel begins with the shrill cry of Mrs. Almayer calling her husband, and "the well-known shrill voice started Almayer from his dream of splendid future into the unpleasant realities of the present hour."[7] Almayer's life was 'unpleasant' and unhappy because, besides other things, his fortunes had been tied with those of a native woman. He had to acquiesce in the marriage with this native woman whom he regarded as no more than a slave to respect the wishes of Tom Lingard, his mentor, who held to him high hopes of gold and money if he married his foster-daughter. Conrad's ironical treatment of Almayer comes into operation right from the first chapter in the way he shows how Almayer suppresses his racial prejudice in order to express a reluctant compliance with Lingard.

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[7] Almayer's Folly, p.1.

Mrs. Almayer was the legacy of a group of notorious pirates who fell upon Tom Lingard's brig one day to rob him of his possession. Mrs. Almayer was then a mere girl but with the rest of her companions she fought desperately on board the prau. When the fight was over and the pirates were done away with, Lingard found her under a heap of dead and dying pirates. In normal circumstances, the girl would be treated as a slave by Lingard as was the custom of making slaves of the war-captives. But Lingard took a fancy for the girl. He adopted her as his child and resolved to give her proper education. He also swore to get her married to a white man and leave her all his money. The girl had, however, no cravings for sophistication and accomplishment. She was quite content to live the usual life of a Malay woman -- "the usual succession of heavy work and fierce love, of intrigues, gold ornaments, of domestic drudgery, and of that great but occult influence on her man which is one of the few rights of half-savage womankind."[8] But she submitted to the wishes of Lingard to get an education. She was put at the Samarang convent for a number of years to cultivate and a acquire the western values of life. But the education did not bring about the desired metamorphosis in

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[8] Almayer's Folly, p.22.

her. In her mind she remained as native as ever. Her acquaintance with western values and the white people only deepened her dislike of them. She had no pleasant memory of her life at the convent and we later find the reactions of a native and half-caste woman fully spelt out in her daughter Nina. The novelist does not deal with the mental reactions of Mrs. Almayer to the new life at length. Even then we get frequent interesting glimpses into her psychology through the authorial comments :

> Perhaps had she known of the high walls, of the quiet gardens, and the silent nuns of the Samarang Convent ... she would have sought death in her dread and hate of such a restraint and the teaching and the new faith -- with calm submission, concealing her hate and contempt for all that new life.[9]

Almayer, who she was married to, was a Dutch. His father was a subordinate official employed in the Botanical gardens of Buitenzorg. At home, the father "grumbled all day at the stupidity of native gardeners",,and the mother "from the depth of her long easy chair bewailed the lost glories of Amsterdam."[10] Lingard took a fancy for him thinking that Almayer would make a good match for his adopted daughter. But he

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[9] Almayer's Folly, p.22.

[10] Ibid., p.52.

was aware of the fact that any white man would think it utterly disgraceful to marry a girl of native origin, however accomplished and beautiful. So while making the proposal to Almayer, he took care that other considerations might weigh heavy on him (Almayer) : " Nobody will see the colour of your wife's skin. The dollars are too thick for that! And mind you they will be thicker before I die."[11] The author's disapproval of Lingard's sense of 'white' superiority is evident from his excessive preoccupation with his adopted daughter's colour and in his defensiveness. Almayer, too, shares Lingard's sense of superiority and arrogance in addition without a grain of human compassion. The alliance is racially repellent to him but he concedes to it because of mercenary expectations. He dreams of eventually inheriting Lingard's wealth and settling down in comforts in a mansion in Amsterdam. But a conjugal relation based absolutely on profit motive can hardly be expected to be a happy one and we eagerly look forward for complications in Almayer's 'mixed' marriage and fortunes.

Soon the marriage reaches a stalemate. Almayer

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[11] Almayer's Folly, p.10.

wanted unquestioning obedience from his native wife but the wife stubbornly refused to submit to any of his racial hang-up. When she realised that Almayer looked upon her merely as a commodity to be bargained for, she swung to the opposite pole. She started to hate him with all the vehemence at her command. Not only did she scorn his assumed posture, she destroyed the elaborate paraphernalia in the house that reminded her of the fake culture of the western people. She tore off the expensive curtains to make sarongs for the slave girls and burnt down the showy furniture piecemeal to make fuel for cooking the family rice. The novelist has not put many words in her mouth and there is little verbal exchange between the husband and the wife from which we could make conjectures. But her silence seems to be more expressive and meaningful. Her hatred and disgust seem to be too deep for words. Thus a good many years' convent education and cultivation of European values could not bring about an effective change in the basic nature of the native girl.

The husband and the wife got totally alienated from each other because of the enormous cultural gap between them. One could not respond spontaneously and sympathetically to the other's most natural needs.

one could not appreciate the other's point of view. The rift between them kept on widening until they got totally estranged. Almayer sought solace in the dream of Lingard's nebulous 'mountain of gold' and Mrs. Almayer removed herself to the cottage made for her where she spent her days in tantrums and intriguing with Lakamba and Babaltchi.

The birth of their daughter Nina did not bring any welcome change in their relation. The character of Nina is important inasmuch as through her Conrad has tried to show us the acute identity crisis and traumatic disorientation of half-caste children. We find Nina oscillating between the mores of the East and the West. She is scarcely able to identify herself with any set of values. In her predicament is dramatised the plight of whole generations of rootless children in all the erstwhile and present colonies. The events of har life -- her miserable interlude in the convent at Singapore, the relation of mutual hatred and disgust between her father and mother at home, her longing for dignity and finally her idyllic romance with the native prince Dain Maroola show the interplay of the two cultural strands in her make-up and the final triumph of the native elements in her inherited from her mother

over the elements of debased western culture symbolised by her father.

Lingard arranged for Nina to stay at Singapore with the Vincks. There she was admitted to the school meant for European children. But the treatment meted out to her at Singapore was not at all congenial to a healthy development of her mind. She had to put up with all sorts of insults and indignities that were laid at her door because of her being a 'half-caste'. The supposedly liberal whites refused to take her into their fold. Nina soon realised that it was her unhappy lot to carry on the disgraceful stigma of her birth throughout her life. Referring to this time, she pointed out to her father on a later occasion that he himself was quite indifferent to her agony :

> "You never asked me", she says, "and I thought you were like the others and did not care. I bore the memory of my humiliation alone, and why should I tell you that it came to me because I am your daughter."[12]

Even her own teachers used to remind her of her disgraceful origin on every occasion. Mrs. Vincks, too, lost no chance to humiliate her on this score. Nina was living in a society where there was none she could

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[12] Almayer's Folly, p.190.

call her own. Everyone she met despised and looked down upon her. Her dilemma and her father's blindness to the unpleasant reality is brought home to us by Mr. Ford, the captain when he tries to make Almayer see reason with these words :

> "She was never happy over there. Those two Vinck girls are no better than dressed-up monkeys. They slighted her. You can't make her white."[13]

This fact is further illuminated by the remarks of the Dutch officers visiting Almayer. They were enchanted by Nina's unexpected beauty, but could not forget her real status in their eyes : "She was beautiful and imposing" the young sub-lieutenant reflected, "but after all a half-caste girl."[14]

Almayer displays a singular lack of understanding of Nina's predicament. He dreamt of taking her off to Europe and marry her off to some white youngman. He did not realise that Nina would not be accepted as an equal in the European society. Conrad's attitude towards Almayer is ironical allthrough. His criticism of Almayer's racism is implicit in the very portrayal

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[13] Almayer's Folly, p.31.

[14] Ibid., p.126.

of Almayer as a dreamer and coward. He cowered before the solemn figure of Nina when she came back from Singapore. He vaguely expected her to give some reason for her unexpected arrival, but did not have the courage to ask her. Nina did not so much as allude to her life at Singapore. The memory was too galling to be recalled. Later in life when Almayer, in a moment of disappointment, asked her if she had forgotten the teachings of so many years, she gave an outburst of her real feelings :

> "No", she interrupted. "I remember how it ended also. Scorn for scorn, contempt for contempt, hate for hate..."[15]

Conrad's dramatisation of Nina's tensions is very effective and convincing. The racial discrimination faced at the convent totally undermined her balance of mind. During the first few days after her return, it seemed to her that she would die out of despair and disappointment. But gradually she overcame this feeling of inertia and adjusted to her conditions wonderfully, so much so that after six months it appeared to her that she had known no other life. Almayer saw that she had submitted to her life at home with exemplary patience and passivity. But it was not

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[15] Almayer's Folly, pp.178-79.

a willing or total submission. Nina had been weighing the different factors that would determine the course of her future life. By then she had had enough acquaintance with both the worlds -- the world of her father and that of her mother. She had sufficient knowledge of both the worlds to condemn one as inferior and accept the other as superior. She found the Europeans and the natives equally endowed with virtues and vices. The common motivations of love and hate and sordid greed were at work everywhere :

> It seemed to Nina that there was no change and no difference. Whether they traded in brick godown or on the muddy river bank; whether they made love under the shadows of the great trees or in the shadow of Cathedral on the Singapore promenade; whether they plotted for their own ends under the protection of laws and according to the rules of christian conduct, or whether they sought the gratification of their desires with the savage cunning and unrestrained fierceness of nature as innocent of culture as their own immense and gloomy forests, Nina saw only the same manifestation of love and hate and of sordid greed chasing the uncertain dollar in all its multifarious and vanishing shapes.[16]

The acuity of Nina's perception is borne out by the narrative. However, mercenary greed has been shown to be a particularly western vice. Most of the white

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[16] Almayer's Folly, p.43.

Most of the white men in the novel are clearly in pursuit of material ends. Lingard, though benevolent, is an exalted pirate and loves to acquire and spend on a grand scale. He lures both Almayer and Willems with money. The Dutch presence in the region (incl-ding that of Almayer) and their rivalry with the English for political supremacy is directed towards economic exploitation of the natives. The society repr-esented by Almayer's family in Java and the Vincks at Singapore is that of bourgeois commercialism. In analysing Nina's thoughts the author fully brings out the bitter joke only hinted at in the 'Author's Note'. As John A. McClure points out :" It is not only that the Malays are far more civilised than they first app-ear to European eyes but that the Europeans themselves are far less so than they believe."[17]

After a long period of indecision and oscillati-on, Nina finally began to feel more drawn towards her mother. She could perceive that her mother's people (the Malays) were not, at least, hypocritical. In comparison with the Europeans, they are less given to disguising their motives with "sleek hypocrisy,

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[17] John A. McClure, Kipling and Conrad:The Coloni-al Fiction (Cambridge, Mass. and London:Harvard Uni-versity Press,1981) p.102.

... polite disguises, ... virtuous pretences."[18] Listening with 'open-mouthed wonder' to the glories of her forefathers where men of her race shone far above the Orang Blanda, she saw "with vague surprise the narrow mantle of civilised morality, in which good-meaning people had warped her soul, fall away"[19] and during those moments she could identify herself totally with her mother. During this climactic period, Almayer could not provide her with any emotional sustenance. Nina felt cheated so far as her father was concerned. As regards Almayer, he loved Nina most, but in his own way. His fabulous dreams of parading her beauty throughout Europe sustained him through severe disappointments and setbacks. It is another matter that in his obsession with his superior origin and money, he did not realise the fact that he loved Nina more as a projection of himself than as a human being with her own individual feelings and thoughts. As a matter of fact, Almayer's colonial upbringing is responsible for his gross confusion of values and his failure to appreciate the cultural displacement from which Nina suffers.

Thus Nina's alienation from her father was very

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[18] Almayer's Folly, p.43.

[19] Ibid., p.42.

painstaking and gradual. And alienation from her father symbolised estrangement from the white people and their values which her father swore to live by. The callousness and hatred of the Europeans drove Nina further and further from their world. She had found out to her cost that the 'civilised' values of her father's people were mere pretensions and that with all her accomplishments and beauty, she would always be looked down upon by them.

Nina's abandonment of western culture was final when Dain Maroola, the ideal Malay prince of her mother's tradition, appeared on the scene. A man totally untrammelled by any influence of civilised self-discipline, Dain's words opened up to her a whole treasure of love and sympathy to which she had been a stranger so far. Here was one (Nina thought) who had no contempt for her half-caste origin and who was ready to accept her as an equal and on her own merit. A prince himself, Dain loved Nina for herself and not for money as Almayer did his wife.

In his treatment of Dain, Conrad seems to suggest implicitly that the Malay's traditional pre-colonial culture was superior in important respects to that of modern western civilisation. Before Nina met Dain,

her view of both Malay and European societies was dominated by a perception of egotism, hatred and greed. But Dain, with his simplicity and dignity demonstrates to her that traditional Malay societies, unlike the colonial societies that had replaced them almost everywhere, also cultivated generosity, love and courage. The prince of the royal family in Bali, Dain came to Sambir seeking gunpowder to repel European incursions and met Nina at Almayer's house. It was more or less love at first sight. In courting Nina, Dain shows all the chivalry and 'open-handed generosity' of his race. It is significant that there is no counterpart of Dain Maroola in the European society in Almayer's Folly. Tom Lingard, though towering far above others in courage and enterprise, is essentially an egoist. He is acquisitive and rootless. In the end he just disappears 'swallowed up' by Europe. Thus Dain is pitted against Almayer in a comparatively uneven contest for Nina's heart. The result was fairly evident right from the beginning.

When Almayer finally realised that Nina was abandoning him, he tries to hold her back by any means. But Nina could not be shaken out of her resolution. The memory of the past years was too bitter to be forgotten so quickly :"You ask me why I want to go and

I ask you why I should stay?"[20] she asked her father. She also reacted sharply to the word 'savage' applied by her father to Dain and pointed out :" You call him a savage! What do you call my mother, your wife?"[21] Almayer could not give her a straight forward answer.

The fault with Almayer lay in the fact that he could never get over his obsession with 'white' superiority and the dream of unearned wealth. In his complacency he took it for granted that he and his daughter belonged to a superior race and culture and that the natives, not excepting his wife, who belonged to an inferior race and had no culture at all, just did not matter. When the truth finally dawned on him, it was too late. The shock that Nina for whom he dreamt all those dreams was ready to abandon him for a native was too much for him and broke him down completely. It is also significant that Almayer's immediate thought was not of personal tragedy but that of social disgrace :

> "I am a white man, and of good family, very good family," he repeated weeping bitterly. "It would be a disgrace ... all over the island... the only white man on the coast. No, white men seeing my daughter with this Malay. My daughter![22]

But Nina was impervious to all persuasions. She had

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[20] Almayer's Folly, p.179.

[21] Ibid.,

[22] Ibid.

got the glimpses of a new life and nothing was going to hold her back. She had realised through suffering the truth about the Europeans and the natives and could no longer be deceived.

By his treatment of Nina and Dain Maroola, Conrad demolishes the myth of imperial ideology more strongly than the 'Author's Note' suggested. Nina is bitterly critical not only of the racism inherent in most Europeans, but their acquisitiveness and mercenary motives as well. "You were speaking of gold then" she reminds Almayer, "but our ears were filled with the song of our love."[23] John A. McClure[24] rightly points out that Almayer's dreams are those of his cash-nexus society and that Dain's more human preoccupations make him and the culture he represents seem superior. The relative incorruptibleness of Dain's traditional Malay character, in contrast to the characters of colonised Malays suggests that the contact with Europeans, far from improving them, has made them corrupt. This fact has been suggested more than once in the novel. Mrs. Almayer reproaches Babalatchi for inaction in the face of aggression with these words: "Men with arms by their sides acted otherwise when I was young", and

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[23] Almayer's Folly, p.179.

[24] John A. McClure, Kipling and Conrad:The Colonial Fiction, p.136.

Babalatchi's retort was: "And where are they, the men of your youth? ... killed by the Dutch."[25] The suggestion here is quite explicit. The European depradations destroyed the Malay's traditional qualities of heroism and bravery. The new political situation calls for hypocrisy and craftiness. Free from the shackles of European domination, the native kingdom of Bali had been prospering. Nina is happy with her husband and child and her happiness confirms the wisdom of her choice.

It must, however, be pointed out that Conrad does not romanticise the native culture. The least impressive aspects of Malay culture is represented by Lakamba much as Almayer represents the disreputable aspects of western culture. Lakamba is a former warrior-adventurer who had come to power through a series of crime, intrigue and accident. As we find in the novel, he is unscrupulous, predatory and indolent. The Rajah is now old, but ever willing to intrigue through his minister Babalatchi. Further, the native society in Almayer's folly also demonstrates mercenary attitudes. On two occasions Nina had been the subject for potential transactions, first when

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[25] Almayer's Folly, p.154.

Abdullah offers Almayer three thousand dollars to purchase her as a wife for Reshid[26] and again when Dain had to pay Mrs. Almayer a small fortune to marry her daughter.[27]

An Outcast of the Islands is written as an inverse sequel or pre-history to Almayer's Folly. It takes us back twenty years when Almayer was still young and his daughter Nina quite a child. It also dramatises the phenomenon of racial incompatibility, the gulf that separates cultures and the individual from his native community. Its world is, again, Sambir, peopled by virtually the same cast of Malayans, Arabs and Europeans. The atmosphere is grim and sombre. The story may conveniently be summarised as follows : Peter Willems, a Dutch youngster who has jumped his ship, is befriended by Tom Lingard, who eventually places him as a clerk with the firm of Hudig and Company. Willems unscrupulously prospers, but is caught allocating company funds towards covering his own speculations and fired. Rejected by his native wife Joana (who is, unknown to Willems, Hudig's illegitimate daughter), he decides to commit suicide, but is once again rescued by Lingard

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[26] Almayer's Folly, p.45.

[27] Ibid., p. p.173.

who takes him to Sambir to stay with Almayer. Despised and feared by Almayer (who has his own interest to protect), Willems disconsolately takes to wandering in the jungle. On one of these walks, he meets the Arab girl Aissa, for whom he develops an overwhelming passion which is exploited by Babalatchi and Lakamba. They compel Willems to guide the ship of Lingard's rival Abdullah up an entrance to the Pantai, known only to Lingard and in a state of total drunkenness reveals his enormous supply of gutta and rattan.

Willems's relation with the family of his first wife Joana is symptomatic of the way colour-prejudices determined the social behaviour of people. Willems's feeling of inferiority in regard to the'pure' Europeans and the compensations he derives from the colonial situation are made explicit enough by his relationship with his wife's dark-skinned relatives, the Da Souzas :

> That family's admiration was the great luxury of his life. It rounded and completed his existence in a perpetual assurance of unquestionable superiority. He loved to breathe the coarse incense they offered before the shrine of the successful white man[28]

It is, however, from Chapter V onwards that the racial

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[28] Joseph Conrad, An Outcast of the Islands (London & Toronto:J.M.Dent and Sons Ltd.,1923), p.126. All references are to this edition.

tensions get intensified. The relationship between Willems and Aissa is a complex one. It is a relation between a European and a Malayan without experience of western culture and civilisation. The extended development of this relationship between two people divergent in racial origins and cultural experiences brings into focus the differences in temperament that makes for incompatibility. Unlike the love of Nina and Dain Maroola, their love is associated with death and decay. Aissa and Willems are irresistibly drawn to each other, yet they have no shared experience, no commonly shared values on which they could build up a lasting relationship. Willems,no doubt, is appealing as a figure from exotic romance - the European enslaved by the 'seductive' native woman. But his love for Aissa could not transcend the barriers of culture, the obstacles that arose because of a lack of communication and understanding of each other's society and ethos.

Willems is acutely aware of his degeneration and demoralisation. He, " a white man, the admired of white men, was held by those miserable savages whose fool he was about to become."[29] He served the cause of Babalatchi and Abdullah not because he had any affection or admiration for them; he felt for them all

[29] An Outcast of the Islands, p.126.

the hate of his race, of his morality, of his intelligence. He knew very well that he was going to be made the victim of political expediency. He also knew that his act would amount to a betrayal to his white father, Lingard, and benefit the Arabs. But he could not help it. The more he served them, the more was his loathing and indignation against them :

> He was carried away by the flood of hate, disgust and contempt of a white man for that blood which is not his blood, for that race which is not his race; for the brown skins, for the hearts false like the sea, blacker than the night.[30]

Willems here seems to voice an attitude typical of most Europeans who regarded the natives and everything pertaining to native life as 'black' and 'treacherous'. Between him and the natives there was a gulf - deep and unbridgeable. He needed Aissa badly. Without her, he thought, there would be no life for him. But he wanted her away from her despicable people. He loved her but hated the race she sprang from.

Later on Willems's feelings towards Aissa change considerably. Civilisation and barbarism struggled within Willems and when he woke up from his

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[30] An Outcast of the Islands, p.152.

hallucination, he began to realise what a mess he had made with himself. He looks upon himself with dismay and pity. "A savage woman!", Willems's conscience is too sensitive for that; and "yet he perceived that he could think of nothing else but of the three days of their separation, of the few hours since their reunion."[31] That was Willems's dilemma. He could neither extricate himself from Aissa, nor could he identify himself in anyway with her. Gradually the irreconcilable nature of their relation is borne in on him. His maddening fascination for her fades gradually and he nostalgically remembers his own people :

> Instead of thinking of her caresses, instead of forgetting all the world in her embrace, he was thinking yet of his people; of that people that steals every land, masters every sea, that knows no mercy and no truth - knows nothing but its own strength.[32]

He makes a fervent appeal to Lingard to take him away from 'that woman'(Aissa), to save him from the quagmire of betrayal, sloth and slavery. Inspite of his claim that he has " no colour prejudices and no racial antipathies";[33] he regards his "love" as

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[31] An Outcast of the Islands, p.126.

[32] Ibid., p.153.

[33] Ibid., p.35.

"surrendering to a wild creature the sustained purity of his life, of his race, of his civilisation."[34]

On almost all occasions of mutual encounter between Willems and Aissa, the author highlights the fact of racial incompatibility. They differ from each other radically in their sense of propriety, in their sense of right and wrong with regard to social norms. Aissa thought the love of the western people which Willems taught her was of the Devil. She detested European women because they were 'shameless' and had 'fierce eyes'. Willems got angry with her when "she beat her breast, and tore her hair and mourned with shrill cries as a woman should"[35] at her father's death. This was obviously not his (Willems's) idea of mourning. When Babalatchi came to visit them, Aissa tranformed herself to what Willems thought "an animated package of cheap cotton goods"[36] as was the custom among native women, though he expressly forbade her doing so. In these moments we find Willems reflecting upon Aissa's disobedience and its possible repercussions in future. It occured to him that she would never change. He wondered whether his ideas themselves would ever change so as to agree with her own notions

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[34] An Outcast of the Islands, p.80.

[35] Ibid., p.228.

[36] Ibid., p.128.

of what was becoming, proper and respectable. The novelist highlights their immense diversity in the following way :

> This manifestation of her sense of proprieties was another sign of their hopeless diversity; something like another *step downwards for him. She was too differ-*ent from him. He was so civilised! It struck him suddenly that they had nothing in common - not a feeling.[37]

Among the native characters, Aissa and Babalatchi are eloquent in their criticism of the Europeans. Aissa vividly remembers the scene when her father's band of pirates was wiped out by the European sailors: "It was an unequal and unfair encounter. They dropped whistling fireballs into the creek."[38] The encounter was 'unequal' and 'unfair' because the Europeans were equipped with firearms and stormed Omar's (Aissa's father) boats carrying his bands who were armed with traditional weapons. In Aissa's eyes, it is the Europeans who are savages and Europe itself is "a land of lies and evils from which nothing but misfortune ever comes to us -- who are not white."[39] This sharply contrasts with Lingard's idea of the natives in need of a benevolent father, like him. Aissa's remark

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[37] An Outcast of the Islands, p.128.

[38] Ibid., p.46.

[39] Ibid., p.144.

certainly proves true in her own case and illuminates the whole imperial situation -- the hypocrisy of the Europeans that was a hurdle in the way of establishing meaningful communication. Lingard and his sailors rendered her homeless; Willems deceived her (he concealed the fact that he was married and had children), alienated her from her father and finally denounced her with revulsion and left her in a condition of utter loneliness. Each time Aissa speaks on this -- and she speaks on at least four occasions in the novel, her voice rings true. She tries to bridge the distance with love but fails miserably, and in the end, "hate filled the world, filled the space between them -- the hate of race, the hate of hopeless diversity, the hate of blood."[40] The edifice of love falls apart and disintegration sets in.

Among the critics of European political domination, Babalatchi is the most perspicuous. Omar's death made his real feelings well out of his heart. He has all along worn the mask of deference to the Europeans but now he faces Lingard on equal footing. When Lingard self-righteously provides justification for his long opposition to Babalatchi's ambition,

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[40] An Outcast of the Islands, p.359.

Babalatchi makes a clean breast of his feelings :

> "This is a white man's talk" exclaimed Babalatchi with bitter exultation. "I know you. That is how you talk while you load your swords; and when you are ready, then to those who are weak you say - obey me and be happy, or die! You are strange, you white man. You think it is only your wisdom and your virtue and your happiness that are true."[41]

Thus Babalatchi explodes Lingard's fraternal pose in no time. He puts his finger on the correct spot when he dismisses Lingard's fraternal pose as a stalking horse behind which the imperialist musters support and strength for the onslaught that will establish him in the only role that he craves for himself i.e. the role of a paternal despot.

Babalatchi, through his long experience and vicissitudes of life, has arrived at a vantage point from which he can make a dispassionate assessment of the Europeans. He accuses them not only of deception but of wilful blindness or self-deception as well. Secure in their idea of white superiority, they regarded themselves as philanthropists working for the enlightenment of the native communities while in reality they were inflicting irreparable damage on those

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[41] An Outcast of the Islands, p.226.

societies. All Lingard's action in Sambir, though ostensibly altruistic, demonstrate his love of power and domination. He congratulates himself on the score of protecting Sambir from predatory incursions, but this is not true. He does it only to keep his monopoly of domination intact. When Lingard points out that Babalatchi has merely traded one white power, *himself, for another, the Dutch rulers at Batavia,* Babalatchi's retort is full of his political wisdom:

> The farther away is the master, the easier it is for the slave, Tuan! You were too near. Your voice rang in our ear always. Now it is not going to be so.[42]

Conrad's appreciation of this kind of triumph becomes significant when we remember the domination of Poland by a power situated far away in Kremlin.

Thus in the first two novels, Conrad highlights the divergence in the cultures of the East and the West. As life frames they are different and in the end incompatible. Both the Malayan and European life have been treated under different aspects, though with different degrees of intensity. All attempts at reconciliation or symbiosis resulted in something unhappy and even disastrous. The intermixing may be healthy, but only to a certain point; when that point

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[42] An Outcast of the Islands, p.226.

is reached, disintegration creeps in. However, in their very nature, Almayer's Folly and An Outcast of the Islands are Conrad's juvenalia. The social, cultural and political implications in these works have a spirit of tentativeness that defies categorisation. On the one hand, we find that Conrad takes recourse to the racial stereotypes supplied by the genre of colonial adventure romance and presents the east as exotic, brooding and evil. On the other, we find that Conrad's juxtaposition of the two sets of values and the mixed response it evokes do not follow a uniform pattern. The individuals and the codes they live by are so different from one another as to make any generalisation ill-conceived and erroneous. Like the political ambivalence of some of his major works, the racial and cultural dualism of the early novels is much more complex than it appears at the first sight. Conrad has as much praise for the good and human qualities of the Europeans as for those of the natives. Again, when it comes to exposure, Conrad unmasks the 'civilised' pretences of the Europeans with as much vehemence as when his tone while describing the vices of the native people is acerbatic. His portrayal of characters and ways of life -- European and Malayan, bears ample testimony to tnis fact.

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Chapter-III

THE EUROPEAN HOLLOWMAN

C H A P T E R - III

THE EUROPEAN HOLLOWMAN

A STUDY OF 'AN OUTPOST OF PROGRESS' AND HEART OF DARKNESS

Conrad's ideas about imperialism and human exploitation which were only vague and tentative during his Malayan phase underwent a radical transformation in the later periods of his literary career. They took concrete and compelling forms in his African phase. The Malayan experience was very trivial compared to what the novelist observed in the interior of the Dark Continent. His awareness of the civilising work in Africa, of the cruelty and greed that lay behind the idealistic professions of the white people finds scathing expressions in "An Outpost of Progress" and Heart of Darkness. The unusual nature of the experience shocked him profoundly and made him aware of the fact that his earlier experiences regarding the imperial situation involving the Europeans and the natives were merely

peripheral. He also realised that the cultural and political implications of the interaction between the Europeans and the natives were immense.

In Heart of Darkness Conrad dealt with a subject most topical and of great significance to all civilised people. Conrad himself was greatly fascinated by the euphoria let loose by King Leopold II's International Association for the civilisation of Central Africa which was formed in 1875. Since its inception, the Association created great enthusiasm in public mind and the expedition of Stanley from Zanzibar to Lower Congo was followed in England with utmost interest and expectation.

This atmosphere of discovery and adventure rekindled Conrad's spirit of adventure and reawakened the geographical passion of his childhood. He was too eager to avail himself of an opportunity to get into the interior of Africa. He was promised the command of one of the Upper Congo steam boats. He also owed this appointment to the good offices of his aunt Madam Paradowska who took an active interest in Conrad's ventures. The fact that Conrad spoke French also contributed to his getting the assignment.

The theme of the story 'An Outpost of Progress' and that of the novel Heart of Darkness is twofold : colonialism which could take the form of human exploitation on a devastating scale and the unhealthy influence cast by native surroundings on the mind of the 'civilised' Europeans. They are the most acute analyses of the gradual deterioration of the white man's morale, when he is let loose from the civilised restraints of Europe and posted off in far off tropical countries as the emissary of knowledge and progress but wonderfully equipped to make trade profits out of the native people. The newly discovered state of Congo promised to white men enormous profit. He assumed the 'Whiteman's burden' of the civilising mission on him under the cover of which he freely indulged in rapacity, plunder and exploitation. His abysmal greed engulfed all his humanitarian feelings.

'An Outpost of Progress' is generally regarded as a sort of prelude to Heart of Darkness. In a way Conrad adumbrated in the story what he was going to do on a greater scale in Heart of Darkness. He himself liked the story and was 'pleased' with it'. He also threw some light on its theme while writing about it to his publisher Fisher Unwin :

> It is a story of the Congo. There is no love interest in it and no woman-- only incidentally. All the bitterness of those days, all my puzzled wonder as to the meaning of all I saw-- all my indignation at masquerading philanthropy have been with me again while I wrote... I have divested myself of everything but pity-- and some scorn while putting down the insignificant events that bring on the catastrophe.[1]

He also described 'An Outpost' as "the lightest part of the loot I carried off from Central Africa."[2] It is a study of the degeneration of two characters -- Kayerts and Carlier in the isolated surroundings of Congo and their rapid disintegration when confronted with the overwhelming solitude and the unusual.

In an introductory essay to Conrad's Prefaces to His Works, Edward Garnett points out that 'An Outpost' is a tale of the Congo that "directly challenged the fashionable imperialistic propaganda and Kipling's gospel of the White man's burden."[3] In this tale, Kayerts and Carlier, two amateur adventurers are asked to command a tiny trading station of the Great Civilising Company. They give up their jobs in England and join the company. They take it as an opportunity to distinguish

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[1] A Conrad Memorial Library:The Collection of George T. Keating (New York,1929), pp.61-2.

[2] Joseph Conrad, 'Author's Note', Tales of Unrest (London & Toronto:J.M.Dent and Sons Ltd.,1923), p.2.

[3] Edward Garnett ed., Conrad's Prefaces to His Works, p.9.

themselves as pioneers of trade and commerce and to earn percentages on the trade. Of course, their pursuit was, at least in part,altruistic and involved an element of rationalised ideology, however suspect or insincere that may be. The 'masquerading philanthropy' that Conrad spoke of is evident in the very title of the post. While it is installed exclusively for the purpose of profit, it is named an outpost of 'progress'. Kayerts and Carlier become the agents of progress while thinking only of personal benefit. Their predominant motive in accepting the assignment was that it would offer them a chance to exercise their freedom and self-will. But when left with absolute liberty and no check, they do not know what to do with it. They are unable to impose any order on their lives.

Conrad's proposed theme is the unhealthy implications of petty trading on the fringes of the Empire. The author ironically refers to the 'print' entitled "Our Colonial Expansion"[4] written in highflown language. Kayerts and Carlier find great consolation in this book and begin to 'think better of themselves'. To Kayerts this is a 'splendid' book as it speaks of 'the rights and duties of civilisation', of the sacredness

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[4] Joseph Conrad, 'An Outpost of Progress', Tales of Unrest (London and Toronto:J.M.Dent and Sons Ltd., 1923), pp.94-5. All references are to this edition.

of the 'civilising work' and extols "the merits of those who went about bringing light, and faith and commerce to the dark places of the earth"; Carlier hopes that in "a hundred years there will be perhaps a town here."[5]

The story is an example of sustained and pitiless irony that Conrad was to display in the treatment of some of his characters. The title itself is unmistakably ironic, playing off the conventional, lofty association of the phrase against the squalid, sordid reality. Kayerts and Carlier think themselves to be the vanguards of civilisation, bringing "quays and warehouses and barracks -- and all"[6], but the writer tells us that they are two useless creatures:" They were two perfectly insignificant individuals, whose existence is only rendered possible through the high organisation of civilised crowds."[7] Their physical feature itself symbolises the incongruity between their professed ideals and their mundane practice. Kayerts is short and fat. The image evoked by the term 'perched' suggests a spiritual attenuation and Carlier's 'very broad trunk' on 'a long pair of thin legs' is the very image of imbecility and greed.

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[5] Tales of Unrest, pp.94-5.

[6] Ibid., p.88.

[7] Ibid.

Kayerts and Carlier share many of the characteristics of Almayer and Willems. Each of them is morally weak, used to the comforts of Europe and is eager to compromise when an easy way to prosperity is offered him. Their compromise involves the acceptance of a life in isolation and savagery in the Outpost in the expectation of a future life of prosperity and fame. Conrad effectively brings out the tension of the two white men in a 'black' environment.

Though Kayerts and Carlier began smugly enough, their hollowness soon began to show itself when they discovered themselves to be totally ill-equipped to deal with the isolation and the inclement surroundings. They could hold out only for a short period after which the loneliness and wilderness began to tell on their nerves. Their tentativeness verging on fear and their helplessness have been brought into sharp relief by their excessive rosy talkativeness and garrulity :

> "Slavery is an awful thing", stammered out Kayerts in an unsteady voice.
> "Frightful -- the sufferings", granted Carlier with conviction.[8]

In less than six months, Kayerts and Carlier forget all about their pioneering work. Sick and demoralised, they spend time malingering and loitering about.

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[8] Tales of Unrest, p.105.

Like Almayer and Willems before them, they began to disintegrate and like Kurtz they drift into a savage way of life which is the very opposite of what they originally set out to do. Carlier "talked about the necessity of exterminating all the niggers before the country could be made habitable."[9] They shamefully connive at the selling out of their native helpers into slavery in exchange for six large tusks of ivory. Of course, Makola, the black caretaker of the Outpost is the real villain and Kayerts and Carlier had to capitulate in order to protect their station from the attack of the band of armed Blacks. Conrad shows that the black natives,,though generally submissive, could become as ruthless and predatory as their white masters. Makola continually blackmails both Kayerts and Carlier. The slavery transaction is completely masterminded by him and when Kayerts threatens him with punishment, Makola sardonically says, "You are very red, Mr. Kayerts. If you are so irritable in the sun, you will get fever and die - like the first chief!"[10] This is enough to send Kayerts into shivers and silence. Besides, both Kayerts and Carlier finally justify the act to themselves in the conviction that the European director must have often "seen worse things done on the quiet."[11]

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[10] Tales of Unrest, p.104.

[11] Ibid., p.109.

The gradual disintegration of Kayerts and Carlier is followed by Conrad graphically. Eventually they degenerate so much that they quqrrel with each other bitterly over a spoonful of sugar. They get savage, chase each other round the hut and Kayerts, afraid that Carlier might point his gun at him, shoots Carlier in a state of nervous breakdown. When the full impact of what he has done to his mate is brought home to him, he hangs himself out of remorse and fear. The all-pervasive irony makes the story devastating in its effect. It was as if Conrad poured all his pent-up disgust and contempt against the irresponsible and imbecile adventurers who indulged freely in personal aggrandisement under the cover of pioneering philanthropy. The ending of the story is a fitting sequel to the whole drama :

> His toes were a couple of inches above the ground, his arms hung stiffly down; he seemed to be standing rigidly at attention, but with one purple cheek playfully posed on the shoulder; and irreverently he was putting his tongue at his managing director.[12]

Heart of Darkness, to a great extent, draws on the personal experience of Conrad in Congo but narrated in the first person by Marlow. According to the 'Author's Note', "the events are experience pushed a little

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[12] Tales of Unrest, p.117.

(and only a very little) beyond the actual facts of the case.[13] Marlow's voyage has multiple dimensions. According to M.M. Mahood, "It denotes simultaneously a geographical location, a metaphysical state and a state of moral enlightenment."[14] It explores simultaneously the exploitation of the Blacks by the Whites, the primordial human condition and the mind's proclivities towards self-aggrandisement and excesses. Above all, its aim is to suggest the horrifying possibilities of that great part of man's mind where doubt itself is lost in an unexplored universe of incertitudes. Conrad shows how some situations will force men back to uncivilised states where centuries of social and cultural achievements are lost in a great blackness of the mind. The very atmosphere in which the actions take place is one of darkness -- darkness that lies deep in human mind and vitiates our noble intentions and obscures our judgements::

> It is a world of darkness of many kinds that this voyage explores, but among these kinds -- the reminder is still critically necessary -- is the reality of colonial exploitation, the ambiguity of the civilising mission into Africa.[15]

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[14] M.M. Mahood, The Colonial Encounter:A Reading of Six Novels,(London:Rex Collins,1977), p.112.

[15] Raymond Williams, The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence (London:Chatto and Windus,1970), p.144.

The tone of the novel is set from the very beginning when Marlow, in connection with his appointment, gives the detail of his predecessor's death. Freselven, his predecessor picked up a quarrel with the native Africans about two hens. In order to assert his arrogance and power "he whacked the old nigger mercilessly"[16] in the presence of a throng of native people. For Freselven, two hens were worth more than a native and his self-esteem counted even more. But the chief's son had also his self-respect and being greatly affected by the victim's groan, he threw a spear at Freselven which went straight between his shoulder blades. So far, the natives and the whites were even. But now the natives took to flight to forest, because they knew that the white man's anger would burst forth destroying them and their dwellings. To highten the irony, the author tells us that Freselven was the gentlest and the quietest man that ever walked on earth. The only fault was that "he had been a couple of years already out there engaged in the noble cause."[17]

This is the general trait of most of the Europeans engaged in the noble cause in Africa. Pursuit of

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[16] Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness in Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories (London & Toronto: J.M.Dent and Sons Ltd.,1933), p.57. Subsequent references are to this edition.

[17] Heart of Darkness, p.57.

profit and ivory had turned even the quietest creatures into cruel brutes. Instead of making the natives more civilised, they made them more demoralised. Use of brute force indiscriminately and to make a discharge of firearms every now and then were their ways of impressing the natives. In fact these were a nice pastime with them. The white men used their force so indiscriminately that sometimes it had a touch of insanity. We find this insanity in the case of the French gunboats that went on firing blindly on the continent because they had come to know that there was a camp of the natives and since the natives could not but be enemies :

> It appears the French had one of their wars going on thereabouts. Her ensign dropped limp like a rag; the muzzles of the long six-inch guns stuck out all over the low hull; the greasy, slimy swell swung her up lazily and let her down, swaying her thin masts. In the empty immensity of earth, sky and water, there she was, *incomprehensible, firing into a continent.*[18]

Later on Marlow met a group of natives and by no stretch of imagination could he call them enemies. Yet these people, harmless and unprotected, were regarded as criminals and had to embrace the bursting bullets of the Europeans, "an insoluble mystery from the sea."[19]

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[18] Heart of Darkness, pp.65-6.

[19] Ibid., p.69.

Curiouly, this is Marlow's first experience of the white 'progress'. As he advances along the river, he comes to know more and more about the mockery of progress and civilisation the white people were spreading out :

> We called at some more places with farcical names, where the merry dance of death and trade goes on in a still and earthy atmosphere as of an over-heated catacomb.[20]

When Marlow lands on the first station, he is struck by the peculiar appearance of the surroundings. It is a scene of "inhabited devastation."[21] The machines brought from Europe for 'progress' look entirely incongruous and out of place in an alien environment. Marlow comes across an undersized railway truck lying on its back, its wheels in the air :"The thing looked as dead as the carcass of some animal."[22] A boiler wallows purposelessly in the grass, a stack of rails is gathering rust, a lot of drainage pipes tumbled up and abandoned in the ravine; pieces of decaying machinery are scattered all over the place. The whole project is a "wanton smash-up".[23] Dull and heavy detonations shake the ground indicating the attempt to blast the rock,

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[20] Heart of Darkness, p.66.
[21] Ibid., p.67.
[22] Ibid., p.68.
[23] Ibid., p.70.

but the explosion is feeble and ineffective. No change appears on the face of the rock: "They were building a railway. The cliff was not in the way or anything; but this objectless blasting was all the work going on."[24] This feeling of continuous outrage invests the scene at Matadi with rich symbolic significance indicating the insanity and ineffectiveness of the Europeans.

At the same station, Marlow experiences another sight more horrifying and vivid. He runs into a grove, "the gloomy circle of some inferno"[25] filled with dying and abandoned negroes. These negroes were collected from different parts of the country to make the station habitable for the white men. In extremely uncongenial surroundings, they were forced to do work that they were not familiar with. They had no way of escape but work. The Europeans extracted the maximum work out of them and paid them three nine-inch long brass-wire pieces a week, which were insufficient to buy them anything. Besides, the unusual food and the inclement climate ate into their vitals and within months most of them were transformed into human carcasses. No medical treatment was given them and they were allowed to perish slowly and painfully :

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[24] Heart of Darkness, p.68.

[25] Ibid., p.70.

> They were dying slowly --it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now -- nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast, in all the legality of time and contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened because of insufficient food and were then allowed to crawl away and rest.[26]

This is a telling instance of the enormous human wastage and human suffering inflicted on the native people of Africa by their European masters. One is filled with a sense of profound compassion for the sick negroes. Conrad's sympathy, mediated through the thought and action of Marlow secures his position permanently as a humanist and not, as alleged, a nihilist. While the pilgrims fire indiscriminately into the bush, Marlow disperses the natives by pulling the boat's whistle to keep them out of harm's way.

Marlow meets the general manager, a typical white trader, who is concerned with only material advantages. Himself a man of robust health, the manager used to express the view that the men who chose to come over to Congo "should have no entrails".[27] He could as well have added that they should have no conscience. For the Europeans do not show the least sign of disconcertment

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[26] Heart of Darkness, p.71.

[27] Ibid.,p.53.

at the spectacle of human suffering. The whole atmosphere at the station was one of sordid materialism : "the word ivory rang in the ear, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A tint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from some corpse."[28] The devoted band of Eldorado Exploring Expedition were no explorers at all. Their talk was those of sordid buccaneers -- "It was reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity and cruel without courage."[29] They lacked even a modicum of foresight or of serius intention. They assumed the role of explorers, but had no idea about the rudiments of geographical exploration: "To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglar's breaking into a safe."[30]

Conrad's corrosive irony can be seen in his designating the predatory Europeans as 'pilgrims'. The image of these pilgrims as gun-carrying traders becomes an apt metaphor for the tactics of colonialism which uses humanitarian platitudes to justify violent usurpation of other people's lands. The pilgrims go to Africa with weapons of war because they know that the

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[28] Heart of Darkness, p.82.

[29] Ibid., p.95.

[30] Ibid.

natives will resist their intrusion and must be vanquished to bring them to submission.

The pilgrims not only conspire against the natives; they are also involved in a deep conspiracy and a fierce competition among themselves -- a competition to make for themselves a place in this highly lucrative trade of ivory. The doctor who showed a good deal of efficiency was not considered 'safe' by the manager. The manager was also deeply concerned about Kurtz. Kurtz seemed to him to have been motivated not by profit only but also by some higher ideals. He is full of anxiety because Kurtz did not conform to his idea of a white trader. The manager derides Kurtz's ideas of progress and humanity : "And the pestiferous absurdity of his talk", he bothered me enough when he was here."[31] To the manager, Kurtz's ideas and tendencies are positively detrimental to the interest of the company :

> Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre for trade of course, but also for humanising, improving, instructing. Conceive you--that áss! And he wants to become the manager![32]

The doctor and Kurtz pose a threat to the manager's absolute sway over the place. He wants to hang

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[31] Heart of Darkness, pp.98-9.

[32] Ibid., p.99.

one of these 'for an example' so that he can go with his exploitation unhindered. The only hitch in his way is that the people brought for development work die too quickly. "All sick, they die so quick, too, that I haven't the time to send them out of the country --it's incredible."[33] Marlow who stealthily overhears the conversation between the manager and his nephew is filled with disgust. The manager regards his labourers and officers alike as mere tools for the furtherance of profit and exploitation.

The Europeans greedily scrambling for ivory in Africa are all hollow men. The chief accountant, tidy to the point of fastidiousness, is called a "hairdresser's dummy."[34] In the land of man-made misery and destitution, the accountant is an incongruity. He hates the natives because their tumult distracts him from work. His unreflective devotion to work makes him callous to human suffering. The manager, another votary of work, "originated nothing" but "could keep the routine going."[35] Marlow wonders what sustains such a man and says, "perhaps there was nothing within him."[36] He is never ill because, Marlow suspects, he had no innards upon which the germs could catch. The

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[33] Heart of Darkness, p.99.

[34] Ibid., p.73.

[35] Ibid., p.74.

[36] Ibid.

brickmaker never makes bricks and is called "a papier-mache Mephistopheles"[37]; he is the very image of banality and Marlow surmises that if he pokes his finger, he would find nothing but a little loose dirt. All these hollow men are suffering from death-in-life situations.

The character of Kurtz is the ultimate testimony to the corrupting influences of individual imperialism -- to both the natives and the Europeans alike. Writing in 1932, J.W. Beach adopted a wholly moral stance towards Kurtz :

> Kurtz is a personal embodiment, a dramatisation of all that Conrad felt of futility, degradation and horror in what the Europeans in Congo called 'progress', which meant the exploitation of the natives by every variety of cruelty and treachery known to greedy men.[38]

A completely opposite view is taken by K.K. Ruthven who thinks of Kurtz as a hero. In an illuminating essay, "The Savage God:Conrad and Lawrence",[39] he points out the way much twentieth century art is fascinated by primitivism. The new frontiers of knowledge supplied by Freudian psychology and Fraserian anthropology

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[37] Heart of Darkness, p.87.

[38] J.W. Beach, "Impressionism:Conrad" in The Twentieth Century Novel(New York,1943), p.343.

[39] K.K.Ruthven, "The Savage God:Conrad and Lawrence", Critical Quarterly, X, 1-2 (1968).

extols the primitive qualities of consciousness. According to his view, Heart of Darkness is an attack on the effete and sterile values of western culture and a restoration of the wholeman Kurtz. However, as we follow Kurtz's advancement (or debasement), this view can not be sustained for a long time in the face of his continued rapacity and greed which are, in the sceme of the novel, particularly western vices.

There is no doubt that Kurtz begins as an emissary of science and progress. Imbued with the ideals of love and philanthropy, he came to Africa and wanted to campaign for them. He was appointed by the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs to study life and suggest ameliorative measures. He is a writer, musician, painter and political orator, apparently combining in himself the values of European culture. But when he reaches Africa and finds himself in a state of absolute freedom, something goes wrong with him. He shakes himself free from all restraints and becomes a law unto himself :"There was nothing either above or below him ....He has kicked himself loose of the earth .... he had kicked the very earth to pieces".[40] Since there was no higher authority for Kurtz to be accountable to, his absolute liberty degenerated into absolute licentiousness.

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[40] Heart of Darkness, p.158.

Kurtz's fault lies in his accepting for himself of a standard that denies human limitations and abandoning the discipline, the responsibilities and the requirements of the civilisation he came from. In carrying the imperialist exploitation to its furthest extreme, Kurtz demonstrates the absurdities of responsibilities and restraints which imperialism parades in public. The manager thinks that oppression and exploitation, carried with restraint and caution, makes for a sound method, which Kurtz rejects as "unsound".[41] For Kurtz, any restraint is irrelevant. As the manager's uncle says,- with no higher authority to watch over one's activities, any action carries its own legitimisation. Ironically, the enlightened emissaries of imperialism, like Marlow's aunt, who want "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways,"[42] are far away from the scene of exploitation and have little knowledge of the culture or the people they want to be civilised or the real nature of those they send out for the civilising work. S.Raval analyses the situation pertinently and points out the ambiguity in the role of these altruists :

> Imperialism puts them in the service of goals they might have refused had they

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41 Heart of Darkness, p.137.

42 Ibid., p.63.

> known the real nature of these goals. A characteristic Conradian insight here is that imperialism blinds those who serve its purpose to the real implications of their actions, so that ideals, seemingly altruistic, bring into being the practical realities of colonial exploitation.[43]

Kurtz's eloquent report to the International Society is a document, ironical in the extreme, exposing the grim reality behind his professed idealism. He starts the report with the excellent argument that the Whites must necessarily appear to the natives as supernatural beings; that they should approach them with the aspect of a deity. Only by raising themselves to a high pedestal to be worshipped by the natives can they fulfil their assumed role: "By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded."[44] Kurtz's accustomed eloquence continues through seventeen pages of the report, touching on almost all the altruistic sentiments. But at the end of the report, comes the prescription, luminous and terrifying : "Exterminate all the brutes!"[45] Civilisation and progress, according to Kurtz, is possible only through the wholescale extermination of the natives. In other words, he becomes a serious advocate of the extermination of of the people he had come to save. One of the striking

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[43] S.Raval, The Art of Failure:Conrad's Fiction, (Boston:Allen & Unwin,1986), p.31.

[44] Heart of Darkness, p.129.

[45] Ibid., p.130.

instances of irony in the narrative is the fact that the International Society appoints none other than Kurtz for the preparation of the report for its guidance. It demonstrates the kind of reputation Kurtz enjoyed in Europe. As Marlow says, "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz."[46]

To Marlow, all colonialist experiences become one whole experience. The human exploitation which imperialism in Africa entailed reminds him of the conquest of Britain by the Romans and the voyages of Drakes and Franklins, "hunters for gold, or persuers of fame"[47], sailing from the light of England to the darkness of unknown seas, returning with the 'round flanks' of their ships bulging with treasure in the Elizabethan period. The same greed for power was at the root of those conquests and the application of brute forces characterised those too :

> They were conquerors and for that you want only brute force - nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind - as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness.[48]

The conquerors bring with them their own darkness

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[46] Heart of Darkness, p.117.

[47] Ibid.,p.52.

[48] Ibid.,p.53.

of ignorance, selfishness and recklessness. Secure in their superior power and shrewdness, the imperialists inflict untold sufferings on the natives who cannot but submit to the strange justice meted out to them. And all this is done in the name of making them more civilised, more humane. The painting by Kurtz - "A small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch,"[49] has also this ominous implication. The torch is obviously the symbol of the light of knowledge against the darkness of ignorance. But the irony is that the torch-bearer herself is blindfolded having no concern to see what disaster her mission is leading her to. The rest of the painting is even more suggestive : "The background is sombre - almost black. The movement of the woman was stately and the effect of the torch on the face was sinister."[50] While marching against the sombre background of Africa, the civilisers may move with stately confidence, because they depend blindly on their own seemingly civilised values, on the lighted torch they carry with them. The effect of the torch on the face of the torch-bearer is sinister because what it ominously illuminates is not benevolence or sympathy but reckless cruelty and greed. Conrad rightly points out that these civilisers were no better

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[49] Heart of Darkness, p.79.

[50] Ibid.

than racialist plunderers out to deprive the native people of their dignity and their treasures, because they have a "different complexion or slightly flatter noses from their own."[51] Conrad directly condemned the rapacity of the Europeans in Africa as, "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration."[52]

The Russian, in his talk with Marlow tries make a clean breast of the enigma that Kurtz was. The recklessness with which Kurtz went about is amply demonstrated by the fact that, as a rule, he wandered alone, "far in the depth of the forest."[53] The Russian also tells that Kurtz had discovered "lots of villages,a lake too",[54] though he did not know in which direction it was situated and it was dangerous to make enquiries. But he is certain about one thing and that is - Kurtz's expeditions were conducted mostly for ivory. "But he had no goods to trade with by that time", asks Marlow. The Russian's answer to this query is immensely suggestive: "There is a lot of cartridges left even yet."[55] In other words, Kurtz raided the villages with firearms. He got the tribes to follow him. The natives

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[51] Heart of Darkness, p.24.

[52] Joseph Conrad, 'Geography and Some Explorers', Tales of Hearsay and Last Essays (London: J.M.Dent and Sons Ltd.,1955), p.17.

[53] Heart of Darkness, p.137.

[54] Ibid., p.138.

[55] Ibid., p.139.

had come to adore Kurtz. He had made full use of his superior intellectual gifts in making the natives believe that he was a god and was successful in getting their obedience and worship. Marlow was at his wit's end. He could not understand how a single man enslaves a whole community of tribal people. The Russian explains the mystery in the following way :

> 'He came to them with thunder and lightning, you know - and they had never seen anything like it - and very terrible. He could be very terrible. You can't judge Mr. Kurtz as you would an ordinary man.[56]

Kurtz, in fact, was acting in accordance with his ideas propounded in his report for International Society for the Suppression of savage Customs. He succeeded in his assuming the role of a supernatural being and exercised unbounded influence on the natives. But even after becoming a virtual god, he could not give up his basic instincts of loot and plunder. His constant search was for more and more ivory. Ivory became a passion with him. The will to grab and possess got such a hold on him that even at the moment of death, we find his mind constantly thinking about them: "My ivory, my intended, my station, my river, my ...."[57] Everything belonged to him. The irony, as Marlow points out, is

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[56] Heart of Darkness, p.140.

[57] Ibid., p.127.

that Kurtz did not realise what forces he belonged to, "how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own!"[58]

Kurtz was ready to shoot the Russian because of a small piece of ivory. This Russian was devoted to him and nursed him through several bouts of illness. Kurtz, being a god, had the absolute power to deal out this kind of instant justice, "because he could do so and had a fancy for it, and there was nothing on earth to prevent him killing whom he jolly well pleased."[59] In other words, he had the undisputed authority to give life to or take it from any one. He exercised this autority indiscriminately. He killed a good many of the natives. His 'unspeakable rites' involved the sacrifice of a human being and partaking of his flesh. He had decorated his house with a garland of human skulls. The Russian tries to justify the action of Kurtz by saying that they were 'rebels'. Marlow could not help bursting out laughing at the commonness of the idea :

> There had been enemies, criminals, workers - and these were rebels. Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks.[60]

Kurtz's famous deathbed cry "The horror! The horror!"[61] has created much confusion among readers and

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[58] Heart of Darkness, p.127.
[59] Ibid., p.128.
[60] Ibid., p.144.
[61] Ibid., p.188.

critics. Lionell Trilling has expressed doubt about Marlow's interpretation that Kurtz was horrified to see, in a moment of epiphany, his abysmal degradation. Trilling says,: "To me it is still ambiguous whether Kurtz's famous deathbed cry "The horror! The horror!" refers to the approach of death or to his experience of savage life."[62] If we keep in mind the whole context of the exclamation, then our acceptance of the latter alternative becomes almost a reasonable certainty. Kurtz's horror is caused by the despair and disillusionment occasioned by the realisation at the moment of death of his 'fall'. For once Kurtz sheds all his deceptive pretensions and pronounces the "judgement upon the adventures of his soul on this earth."[63] However, the important fact here is that the feeling of horror enunciated above extends from the mere personal to the universal. It extends to the cultural and political levels inasmuch as Kurtz's disintegration -- cultural, moral and otherwise, was necessitated by the demands of imperialism and political idealism, both of which are essentially products of western civilisation. The total mental vacuity of Kurtz becomes a powerful symbol of the spiritual attenuation and hollowness of the contemporary European civilisation. About two decades later, T.S.Eliot's selection of the phrase

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[62] Lionel Trilling, Beyond Culture:Essays on Literature and Learning(NewYork:Viking,1968), p.20.

[63] Heart of Darkness, p.188.

"Mistah Kurtz - he dead",[64] as the epigraph of The Hollow Men has added a fresh dimension to Kurtz's hollowness.

The cultural dimension in Heart of Darkness assumes utmost significance. We see the explorers and traders from Europe crowding in the Dark Continent. They undertook the voyage to Congo seeking to discover the savage communities and civilise them. Thus they were 'pilgrims'. Their voyage was a sacred voyage. But it is interesting to know how their values underwent a seachange when they stepped into Africa. Their mission went awry, they forgot all their professed values; they indulged in unmitigated savagery themselves.

It has already been pointed out that a good number of pilgrims made it for Congo for the purposes of trade and gain rather than for any less material purpose. Their search was for ivory, rubber and other cash crops. It is true that greed and lust for power are inherent in mankind. But this does not detract from the fact that all the pilgrims were Europeans and in their activities are shown the hollow sham those Europeans were, the enormous gap between their acts and their idealistic professions. As we have seen, without the imperialist conviction of his essential supremacy

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[64] Heart of Darkness, p.188.

and without the means afforded by the colonial venture, Kurtz could not have become a ritual god. The culture which gave rise to imperialism and colonialism and displayed philanthropy and civilisation loses its bearings when it discovers its basis in the passions, when it sees its best emissary crawl on all fours to join some "unspeakable rites"[65] that involve human sacrifice.

Marlow emphasises again and again the darkness of the African continent and by means of contrast it underscores the enlightenment of the white people who were making the pilgrimage. Going from Britain to Africa seemed like a journey from the modern age back to the beginning of history :"Going up that river was like travelling to the earliest beginnings of the world when vegetation rioted and the big trees were kings."[66] The natives of Congo were living in pristine innocence and savagery when the white people first invaded them. The first Blacks seen by Marlow on his journey up the Congo had a wild and throbbing vitality: "They shouted, sang ... they had bones, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast."[67]They wanted no excuse for being there in contrast to the pretensions of the

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[65] Heart of Darkness, p.187.

[66] Ibid., pp.92-3.

[67] Ibid., p.65.

Europeans to civilise them. They were both surprised and fascinated when they saw steamships and firearms. When the ships blew the whistle, they used to flee away thinking the ships to be huge monsters out to devour them. The Europeans with their fair complexion, physical features and modern accessories of civilisation were so outside the pale of native experience that it was only natural that the natives came to regard them either as devils or gods. The Europeans did not try to undeceive them because that would have amounted to recognise them as equals and exposed their hypocrisy.

It is a debatable point whether the Europeans got corrupted because of the native surroundings or whether the corruption was inherent in the very motives of the Europeans which drove them to Africa. Some critics, including Guerard[68] advance the theory of reversion to explain the metamorphosis. They argue that when the Europeans are let loose from a life of established rules and regulations, when they have no higher authority to be accountable to, the temptation of ignoring the rules is great. When they are exposed to primitive savagery, the desire to throw rules to the wind and indulge in irresponsible activities takes hold of them. Avrom Fleishman[69] advocates the theory of 'going ntive'

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[68] A.J.Guerard, Conrad the Novelist(New York: Athneum,1967), pp.36-9.

[69] Avrom Fleishman, Conrad's Politics(Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press,1967), p.90.

which means that because of long exposure to the mores of native life, the Europeans came to be influenced by them unconsciously and inspite of themselves. He also shows that it is precisely the most destructive forces in native life which the primitivists acquired, rather than the positive and chivalric values that are to be found in some native societies.

These theories may have partial validity in explaining some of the aspects of the narrative. But if they are adopted to explain away the corruption of the Europeans, the effect will be disastrous. It will be tantamount to exonerating the European imperialist adventurers from the crimes of cruelty and irresponsibility and make the native people, who were the worst sufferers, responsible. These theories seem to suggest that the Europeans acted in defiance of all noble human values not because of the drive inherent in their own community but because they had been contaminated by their contact with the immense wilderness of the jungle and the savagery of the natives. It is only a travesty of truth, an excuse which the Great powers offer to rationalise their unlawful acts. The theory has great relevance in the present day politics too. The Great powers make every effort to justify the large-scale

devastation giving it the appearance of some legitimate form of self-defence.

The Belgian rulers in Congo tried their best to offer extenuating excuses 'for being there'. They tried to rationalise their cruelty giving it all the appearances of self-defence. Such barbarism and cruelty as they indulged in were, according to them, the prevalent and accepted code of conduct in the native societies. As a matter of fact, they were able to keep the whole civilised world befooled for a considerable period of time. The manager and his uncle reveal this fact in their talk too: "The danger is in Europe; but there before I left I took care to ..."[70] Obviously they took all measures to stifle public opinion or revert it to their favour.

Thus, in Heart of Darkness, it is to the European traders-cum-explorers that Conrad shifts squarely the burden of responsibility. He made no bones about the fact that the degeneration and disintegration set in because of the errors committed by the Europeans -- errors of omission and commission. No amount of polemics can justify their unwarranted exploitation and

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[70] Heart of Darkness, p.98.

acts of devastation. They did the greatest harm to the natives by destroying the primitive order of society without replacing it by an alternative one. The Belgians in Congo were in need of native labourers in places far away from where they were to be found. They frightened them into submission and took them away to the newly growing cities like Leopoldville and Elizabethville and thus created a rift between the newly created urban proletariat and their 'uncorrupted' brethren in the traditional society. The tribal chiefs found that the recruitment as labourers of their subjects by the Europeans would undermine their autority and they resented it. But they could not cope up with the superior might of the Europeans and were either subdued or extirpated. Eventually, the tribal structure of society totally broke down: "Unfortunately the destruction of the chiefly system had been so complete that by 1917 the Belgian officials stood face to face with a native rabble".[71] As late as 1958, when the Belgians thought of going back to the old system of tribal chiefs and wanted to delay independence, they were pathetically late.

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[71] Stephen H.Roberts, "Native Policy", Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, XI, p.274.

Chapter-IV

THE COSTAGUA NAN REPUBLIC

C H A P T E R - IV

THE COSTAGUANAN REPUBLIC

A STUDY OF NOSTROMO

In regard to the development of Conrad's cultural and political thought, Nostromo is the most significant work in the early phase. It is much more ambitious than either the Malayan novels or the African tales. The canvas here is enormously large and the narrative extremely convoluted. It weaves a complex pattern in which public life seriously impinges on and is inextricably mixed up with the fate of the private individuals. It presents us with a view of history in which hope for a better future has constantly been belied. Conrad's discerning eye looks into the actual workings of mass movements and revolutions with an insight both mature and deep and his generalisations, with very minor qualifications, hold true even today in developing and underdeveloped countries. Conrad wrote: "Costagu-

ana is meant for a S.American state in general."[1] He also meant Nostromo to be a study of "the passion of men short-sighted in good and evil."[2] The novel's relevance to the twentieth century thought is so striking that V.S.Pritchett rightly remarks,: "...it might have been written in 1954 and not, as it was, in 1904."[3] Walter Allen observes :

> Nostromo is a political novel in the profoundest meaning of the word and this is the index of Conrad's achivement -- it may stand as a picture of the modern world in a microcosm.[4]

Nostromo is the first of the great novels in the writing of which Conrad depended more on the information provided by books than on his personal maritime or land experience. Costaguana is a developing country, but it is different fron the Malay Archipelago or Congo. The latter were colonies whereas the former was politically independent while belonging to the financial 'empire' of the Holroyds and Sir John. The fictional realities of Costaguana are established with such convincing use of realistic details that one is surprised at the discovery that Conrad actually saw pretty little of the Latin American province. In 1876, he briefly visited

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[1] G.Jean Aubry, Joseph Conrad:Life and LettersI, p.315.

[2] Ibid.

[3] V.S.Pritchett, The Working Novelist(London:Chatto & Windus,1965), p.194.

[4] Walter Allen, The English Novel(Penguin Books, 1954), p.304.

the ports of Cartagena in Colombia and Puerto Cabello and La Guaira in Venezuela while serving as a steward on the bark Saint Antoine. As Najder says, "several days on land provided Conrad with the visual material for Nostromo."[5] Of course while Conrad was working on the novel, there was great ferment in the world of politics. Imperial power itself was dwindling and changing its shade and implications -- from martial to economic. The British Empire was facing serious crises and its powers were being challenged by newly emergent rivals, particularly The United States and Germany. Around the turn of the century, Central and South American affairs were the frontpage stuff in newspapers: there was the Spanish American war in which Spain had to part with the Phillipines and Cuba and there was the U.S. intervention in Columbia resulting in the secession of Panama in 1903. The story of Costaguana exhibits, as Irving Howe[6] has shown, the typically Latin American cycle of revolution and counter-revolution which is not social or utopian but neo-colonial and militaristic.

Conrad's friend Cunningham Graham who travelled extensively in South America and evinced a keen

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[5] Zdzislaw Najder, Joseph Conrad:A Chronicle(Cambridge:Cambridge University Press,1973), p.373.

[6] Irving Howe, Politics and the Novel(New York: Horizon Press,1957), p.123.

interest in South American affairs was also a source of inspiration to him. During 1903, the year Conrad devoted to Nostromo, he wrote at least two letters to Cunninghame Graham specifically on this. The first, written on 9th May, contains the following: "I want to talk to you on the work I am engaged on now. I hardly dare avow my audacity -- but I am placing it in Sth America in a republic I call costaguana....But you must hear the subject and this I can't set down on a small piece of paper."[7] His second letter, written on July 8, shows the need for further assistance :

> I am dying over that cursed Nostromo thing. All my memories of central America seem to slip away. I had just a glimpse 26 years ago. That is not enough pour batir un roman dessus.[8]

There must have been several discussions with Graham on the subject. In the 'Author's Note', Conrad also acknowledges his debt to the book in which he came across the 'vagrant anecdote' about the stolen lighter of silver. The book has now been identified as On Many Seas: The Life and Exploits of a Yankee Sailor (1897). The other book he acknowledged a debt to is, Seven Eventful Years in Paraguay (1869). These books were helpful inasmuch as they supplied Conrad with names, incidents, topography, hints for characters etc.. Conrad's art

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[7] G.Jean Aubry, Life and Letters I, pp.314-5.

[8] Ibid., p.315.

absorbed all these bits of information and his extra-ordinary power of visualisation played its magic on th-em to create a unique effect.

The central theme of the novel may be pinned down as the evil effects of economic imperialism. It is tr-ue that Conrad did not use the term 'economic imperial-ism' because it did not gain currency till then. But there is no denying the fact that Conrad was surely contemplating about it in Nostromo. Conrad's term for it is 'material interest', and it is the silver-- be it in the untapped form in the San Tome mine or the light-erful which Nostromo and Decoud take to safety and whi-ch, after the death of Decoud, becomes the sole posse-ssion of Nostromo and takes the dimension of a stolen treasure, is the pivot round which the action of the novel revolves. The San Tome silver mine with its broo-ding presence vitiates the personal life of almost all the major characters. It stood as a wall between indi-viduals eager for communication and establishing a hea-lthy and meaningful human bond. Conrad himself indica-tes as much when he writes to Ernest Bendz: "I will take the liberty to point out that Nostromo has never been intended for the hero of the tale of Sea-board, Silver is the pivot of the moral and material events effecting

the lives of everybody in the tale."[9]

Conrad's treatment of material interests is to be judged by his developing attitudes towards imperialism. In his terms, the ascendency of foreign material interest is a form of conquest. Gould, though a domestic enterpreneur, has foreign (English) affiliations and he needs the support of a foreign investor, Holroyd (American) to extend him capital needed for the mining activity. The economic enterprise, the mine, needs a political agent at Sta Marta; it tactfully and extensively bribes those with political influence to be left in peace. These insights into the 'real politik' of the developing world are authentic. They have direct parallel to the European and American commercial and political intervention in Spanish American affairs. Towards the end of Nostromo, the Occidental province of Sulaco gets separated from Costaguana as a result of the counter-revolution. This secession is in the interest of American capital in that it secures, for the time being and with Holroyd's approval, the wealth of the mine, Holroyd's investment. As happened in Panama, in Costaguana also, the secessionists got an edge over their enemies by the arrival of the U.S. navy :

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[9] G.Jean Aubry, Life and Letters II, p.296.

> An international naval demonstration ... put an end to the Costaguana-Sulaco war. ... The United States Cruiser, Powhattan, was the first to salute the Occidental flag.[10]

That the mine is not going to be a harbinger of peace is hinted at the very beginning when the first consignment of silver is brought down to Sulaco. On that occasion, 'the charge of the San Tome silver escort' through the city suggests "the reckless rush and precise driving of a field battery hurrying into action."[11] And for the Europeans, "each passing of the escort under the balconies of the Casa Gould" is "like another victory gained in the conquest of peace for Sulaco."[12] The ironical tone here clearly implies that the Goulds' habitual assumption of progress as a concomitant of material advancement is open to question. This is an issue on which most of the critics seem to be at cross-purposes. Robert Penn Warren, for instance, maintains that Albert G.Guerard's view that instead of progress, the mine brings civil war is, 'far too simple'. He maintains an optimistic view of the political development: "We must admit that the society at the end of the book is preferable to that at the beginning."[13] In the novel and in the essays written

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[10] Joseph Conrad, Nostromo,(London:J.M.Dent and Sons Ltd..1917), p.487. All references are to this edition.

[11] Ibid., p.114.

[12] Ibid., p.115.

[13] Robert Penn Warren, "On Nostromo," The Art of Joseph Conrad:A Critical Symposium ed. R.W.Stallman(Michigan 1962), p.222.

about that time, Conrad leaves no doubt that the ways of material interests are extremely dubious. The first part of the novel, 'The Silver of the Mine' contains ample suggestive passages indicating that the advancement of modern capitalism has robbed the country of its picturesque landscapes, its repose, its tranquility. Mrs. Gould feels sad at the thought that the wind of change would obliterate the small, beautiful things:

> ... I will confess that the other day , during my afternoon drive when I suddenly saw an Indian boy ride out of a wood with the red flag of a surveying party in his hand, I felt something of a shock. The futuremeans change - an utter change. And yet even here, there are simple and picturesque things that one would like to preserve.[14]

The sparse row of telegraph poles which are the external signs of material progress are, "waiting outside for a moment of peace to enter and twine itself about the weary heart of the land."[15] The hidden treasures of the earth on which the country grows rich are "hovered over by the anxious spirit of good and evil," and that the new life to which it has led is full of "unrest" and "toil".[16] It is difficult to maintain Warren's views in the light of Mrs. Gould's practical experience. Her remark is indicative of the deep communal bonds and perfect harmony between native life and Nature

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[14] Nostromo. p.120.
[15] Ibid., p.166.
[16] Ibid., p.504.

that would be snapped by the onslaught of industrial-economic-materialistic changes.

That Conrad was seriously contemplating about growing industrialism, material progress and political philosophies is evident from at least three essays written around the time he was engaged on Nostromo. They are 'The Crime of Partition', 'Anatole France' and 'Autocracy and War'. In Richard Curle's copy of Nostromo Conrad wrote that it was his ambition 'to render the spirit of an epoch in the history of Sth America', and significantly, the epoch of Costaguana which he wanted to articulate, was one bristling with constant war, violence and bloodshed. In 1905, Conrad, in his 'Autocracy and War' remarked about Germany that, "Germany's attitude proves that no peace for the earth can be found in the expansion of material interests which she seems to have adopted exclusively as her only aim, ideal and watchword."[17] In the same essay, he gives his unequivocal judgement on the workings of material interests:

> Industrialism and commercialism... stand ready, almost eager, to appeal to the sword as soon as the globe of the earth has shrunk beneath our growing numbers by another

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[17] Joseph Conrad, "Autocracy and War", Notes on Life and Letters, p.113.

> ell or so. And democracy, which has elected to pin its faith to the supremacy of material interests, will have to fight their battles to the bitter end ....[18]

The same strand of logic pervades through the novel in Conrad's treatment of the implications of the San Tome silver mine on the politics of Costaguana. Towards the end of Nostromo, Dr. Monygham, an otherwise eccentric character, makes a remark which has obvious Conradian overtones that there is no peace and no rest in the development of material interest :

> They have their law and their justice. But it is founded on expediency and inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found only in a moral principle. Mrs. Gould, the time approaches when all the Gould Concession stands for shall weigh heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty and misrule of a few years back.[19]

The novel recreates the past of Costaguana and that of the Gould family by means of flashbacks. It is through this technique that we come to know that the past history of Costaguana is a series of ideologically tenuous revolutions, oscillating between the tyranny of popular dictatorships and the rule of a partly enlightened, but self-centred, aristocracy. We also

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[18] Joseph Conrad,"Autocracy and War", Notes on Life and Letters, p.107.

[19] Nostromo, p.511.

know that Chales's father was a wealthy merchant who had to put up with the frequent exactions of forced loans by successive governments. It is during the regime of such a government that the heavily taxed San Tome silver mine was arbitrarily wished on him. Having had no knowledge of mining and no experience in the field, he tried all possible means to waive it, but in vain. He took his life to be doomed and in fact "the mere vision of it arising before his mind in the still watch of the night had the power to exasperate him into hours of hot and agitated insomnia."[20] Even his letters to Charles, then a student in England, were filled up with practically nothing but the mine. He implored his son never to return to Costaguana, never to claim his inheritance there because it was tainted by the infamous Gould Concession -- "never to touch it, never to approach it, to forget that America existed ...."[21] Eventually the father dies -- a disappointed man, trying in vain to make the mine a working concern. The Concession is thus posited at the very beginning of the novel as something supremely challenging and dangerous which Charles Gould may either take up or leave alone.

Charles Gould qualifies as a mining engineer in

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[20] Nostromo, p.154.

[21] Ibid., p.57.

England. During his holiday in Italy, he meets Emilia, an orphaned English girl who was staying with her aunt. They fall in love and on the day of their engagement, Chales receives the news of his father's death. Contrary to his father's wishes, Charles decides to reopen the silver mine. His decision is prompted on the one hand, by the wish to redeem his father's failure and on the other, by a vigorous impulse to contain the political corruption that has been the cause of his undoing. Charles gives Emilia to understand the pattern of the life she would be subjected to as his wife in the remote state of Costaguana. Emilia accepts it and shares his enthusiasm in righting what they thought a grievous wrong. Both of them return to Sulaco.

Costaguana is politically unstable. The San Tome mine itself contributes to its instability. It could have as many as four governments within a span of six years. The tyranny of Guzman Bento was followed by a 'fatuous turmoil of greedy factions' and it is during this turmoil that Gould reopens the mine and tries to develop it. According to Gould, the development of the mine holds out great social promise. At this stage, his views of wealth are necessarily bound up with social upliftment and political stability :

> What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security. Anyone can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests. Only let the material interests once get firm footing, and they are bound to impose conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. that is how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterwards....[22]

Gould is a materialist who believes in the primacy of materials over mind. Material progress, according to him, is the first prerequisite to the stability of an equitable social order. The nineteenth century myth of progress in Europe was inevitably linked with material-scientific advancement. Conrad subjects this myth to searching scrutiny in Nostromo through a powerful analysis of the dynamics of power and politics in Costaguana.

As pointed out before, Gould begins with the assumption that in developing the mine, he would be fulfilling a moral obligation to his father and help establishing a 'better justice'. He decided to pursue a policy of neutrality towards the internal affairs of Costaguana. His only object is to develop the mine as an "imperium in imperio", an autonomous multi-national

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[22] Nostromo, p.22.

organisation. It is only gradually that he comes to realise that the material progress has its own demands which are both ruthless and immoral or amoral. He is constrained to make all sorts of compromises. He has to give his reluctant assent to intrigue, to bribe, to acquiesce silently in various abuses. His willingness to compromise and stoop for his weapons paves the way for his eventual participation in the political conflicts of the country and support the dictatorship of Don Vincente Ribiera :

> What was currently whispered was this - that the San Tome Administration had, in part, at least, financed the last revolution.... Serious, well-informed men seemed to believe the fact, to hope for better things, for the establishment of legality, of good faith and order in public life.[23]

Gould's object to ensure political stability within which the mine can operate stands to reason, but the danger lies in his alignment with Ribiera, the new head of state and General Montero, Minister of War. Ribiera is physically a cripple and politically impotent. Montero is an unscrupulous power-grabber and a brazen mercenary. His brusque toast to Holroyd, the American investor, "to the health of the man who brings us a million and a half of pounds"[24] embarrasses everyone

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[23] Nostromo, p.117.

[24] Ibid., p.120.

in the assembly. The alliance with Ribierism is more dangerous than that with Holroyd, "precisely because Holroyd is less unlike Gould than is Ribiera and is not dependent upon a Montero."[25] The paradox of Ribierism is that Montero unavoidably comes with it. Gould's final compromise comes when he puts himself at the head of a separatist movement. The objective of the movement was to secede from the Costaguanan province and establish an independent state. The idea of secession is, however, originated by Decoud, in conjunction with Emilia, each of whom has his own motives for separation.

The degradation of Gould's professed ideal is underlined by the growing disgust at the methods which he is constrained to go on using. His wife Emilia had an abiding faith in her husband's mission because it was in line with her own ideal of improving the condition of the poor people. But after a time she is totally disillusioned. She slowly comes to recognise the subtle transformation in Chales's nature. She realises that the public mission of material progress is incompatible with her private world of utilitarianism. She is more discerning and humane than her husband. When

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[25] Stephen K.Land, Conrad and the Paradox of Plot (London and Basingstoke:The Macmillan Press Ltd.,1984) p.116.

she realises that the mine is not going to play its expected role and is becoming a rallying force for selfish intrigues, she withdraws her support from it while her husband pursues success blindfolded. Thus happens a parting of ways between the husband and the wife.

Violence and disorder in Costaguana, to a large extent, spring from motives which are fundamentally materialistic and predatory. Moreover, political regimes in Costaguana change with astonishing rapidity. This entails shifting of loyalties and allegiances by politicians and generals, all in the name of 'democracy' and progress, though in fact, to achieve personal power and wealth. Fredric Jameson rightly points out that Nostromo is about the coming of capitalism in a world which is not prepared for it.[26] The native culture was in a fluid state and could not develop any mature or comprehensive political sense and an appreciation of national problems around which debates and discussions might take place. The result is a brand of politics which is unashamedly opportunistic. Thus, for instance, General Montero who pledged support to the Goulds, readily abandons the Ribierist cause at the first sign of

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[26] Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious:Literature as a Socially Symbolic Expression(Ithaca, New York, London:Cornell University Press,1981), pp.272-3.

popular uprising. He aligns himself with his bandit brother Pedro and leads the oppsition agaist the very people who invested him with the highest military power. Sotillo is mortally afraid of General Montero's imminent descent on Sulaco that must rob him of his position of power. Gamacho's demagogic declamations are a parody of political propaganda. The ideal of democracy finds its degraded adherent in none other than Don Juste Lopez.

Gould's assumption that he could use wealth "as a means, not as an end",[27] gave him strength and drive to overcome the heavy odds in the way of the development of the mine. But by the end of Nostromo, this assumption lends itself to substantial doubt. We have the strong impression that for him silver became an end in itself and that he ended being used up by it. He is extremely taciturn, often seems afraid of having to face his own thoughts and his "silent fits of abstraction" seems, as Conrad points out, "the energetic concentration of a will haunted by a fixed idea."[28] Gould's only fault is that he makes his ideal an obsession and being obsessed by the ideal, he is totally indifferent to the sufferings of the people around him, particularly that of his wife. He idealises the mine to such an extent that it

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[27] Nostromo, p.75.

[28] Ibid., p.379.

alienates him from his near and dear ones. With his sceptical probity, Decoud brings this fact home to Mrs. Gould :

> 'Mrs. Gould, are you aware to what point he has idealised the existence, the worth, the meaning of the San Tome mine? Are you aware of it?'[29]

It is only towards the end of the novel that Gould realises that he has 'something of an adventurer's easy morality'. As Juliet Mclauchlan points out :"Gould's gradual corruption results in a real diminution of what he is."[30] He loses in stature and his personality shrinks to a degree. A great emptiness grows within him. The abiding impression is that he is preeminently "shortsighted in good."[31]

The Ribierist party whose watchwords were "Honesty, Peace and Progress",[32] is typical of an economic colony. It is represented by the Europeanised aristocratic upper class, the Blancos. The ordinary people are illiterate, poor and politically immature. They have no political clout and are left entirely without a say in the formation of governments. The inevitable process

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29 Nostromo, p.214.

30 Juliet Mclauchlan, Notes on Nostromo(London:Edward Arnold,1969), p.32.

31 'Author's Note', Nostromo, p.IX

32 Nostromo, p.121.

of change of power is revolution. Revolution in Costaguana needs the help of the army chief, General Montero -- a crude, deceitful manipulator. There is dearth of leadership and drive. Don Jose Avellanos, 'the life and soul' of the party looked "so frail, so weak, so worn out."[33] He is prevailed over by the pretentious Don Juste Lopez in the council that was contemplating surrender. Ribiera is a constitutionalist of sorts and he tried to give Costaguana a semblance of constitution and establish law and order in the country. But he is a man of "delicate and melancholy mind physically almost a cripple."[34] He proves himself incapable of rising to the occasion. His government is overthrown by the military revolt engineered by General Montero and his brother Pedro. It is a sad commentary on Costaguanan politics that it is tyrants and freebooters who always gain an upperhand in the governance of the country and the people who are enlightened look towards England and America for guidance and help. An absurd man like Barrios leads the Ribierist army and but for the super-human feat of Nostromo in calling back the forces from Cayta, all the Europeans would have been summarily executed by Montero brothers and the separation of Sulaco could never have been a reality.

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[33] Nostromo, p.235.

[34] Ibid. p.233.

Antonia and her father, Don Jose Avellanos represents selfless and enlightened patriotism. Don Jose has fought, suffered and kept up his faith. He did not succumb to the pressure of Don Juste Lopez who was impatient to wean him over to capitulation with Montero and negotiate surrender. He has an abiding faith not in any political institution but in a political code permeated by an awareness of the values on which it is based and of the people it is expected to serve: "The old idea of feudalism had disappeared .... For his part he did not wish to revive old political doctrines. They were perishable. They died. But the doctrine of political rectitude was immortal."[35] He encouraged Decoud to go on with his programme of the separstion of Sulaco. He himself has become almost a spent force, an anachronism in an epoch of treachery, hypocrisy and demoralisation of all human values. We last see him, "stretched out, hardly breathing, by the side of the erect Antonia, vanquished in a life-long struggle whose stagnant depths breed monstrous crimes and monstous illusions."[36]

Antonia inherited her father's patriotism and her life is dedicated to the establishment of a better government that will look after the cause of the poor

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[35] Nostromo, pp.136-7.

[36] Ibid., p.362.

people. She is not outraged by the amoral politics of Costaguana and looks upon the compromises her uncle and father are constrained to make as necessary evils. Her really emancipated and enlightened ways, her concern for the Goulds, her passionate idealism set her apart from other characters in the novel. She is the focus of Decoud's passion and the spur of his action. She adapts herself all too admirably to the prevalent Costaguanan belief in violent social change and justifies her continued support of the people, whatever their inadequacies :

> How can one abandon groaning under oppression those who had been our countrymen only a few years ago, who are our countrymen now? ... How can we remain blind and deaf without pity to the cruel wrongs suffered by our brothers?[37]

After the separation of Sulaco, Antonia's endeavours are directed towards annexing the rest of Costaguana to the order and prosperity of Sulaco. With this end in view she, in conjunction with her uncle, Father Corbelan, makes plans to form a coalition with various societies based in Sta Marta. She, in her optimism and naivete, looks forward to another revolution in the vain hope that a peace will finally be realised that will endure. She is incapable of grasping the ways in which Sulaco's material prosperity has adversely affected

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[37] Nostromo, p.509.

both the tradition of the people and the lives of many of the characters in the novel.

One of the important motifs in Nostromo is scepticism. This is an inevitable product of the cultural and political environment. The chronic political instability makes the Costaguanan society a loose rather than a cohesive one where each individual works to satisfy some passion of his own, each person is a victim of his own obsessions. Absence of any common central organising principle in the lives of the main characters makes them work in different directions, weakening the society and the state. The social environment is vitiated by an all-pervading cynicism and each successive government brings with it its own brand of corruption and a cynical disregard of all patriotic impulses. Martin Decoud best exemplifies this attitude of scepticism. Decoud is personally an outsider, a man of European culture and racial background though he has, like Gould, a family history of settlement in Costaguana. He is first introduced to us as a sterile dilettante frequenting the Boulevards in Paris. He allowed himself to be drawn into the affairs of Costaguana by nonchalantly agreeing to bring out a consignment of automatic rifles to Sulaco. The Avellanos expect him to participate in the movement to suppress Montero and to his utter surprise, Decoud finds it

impossible to refuse. But he is no believer in disinterested human actions and he justifies it through a 'sane materialism': his love for Antonia and a desire to satisfy her patriotic zeal. He becomes a Blanco journalist, the editor of Porvenir, the mouthpiece of the Ribierist party. Having compromised himself for Antonia, Decoud gets gradually involved in the local affairs. As a sensitive person, he is disturbed by the strife and suffering of the people though he does not admit it. The reality of Costaguanan politics seems closer to him because of Antonia's unwavering belief in the cause. "I suppose I am more of a Costaguanero than I could have believed possible"[38], he says to himself. He develops a deep insight into the history of the sub-continent ravished by persistent barbarism, a series of civil wars, conspiracies , revolutions and counter-revolutions. To explain this generic Latin American defects, he propounds a racial theory accounting for the chaos that is Latin American history :

> There is a curse of futility upon our cha-characters: Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, chivalry and materialism, high-sounding sentiments and supine morality, violent efforts for an idea and a sullen acquiescence in every form of corruption. We convulsed a continent for our independence only to become the passive prey of democratic

[38] Nostromo, p.176.

> parody, the helpless victims of scoundrels and cut-throats, our institutions a mockery, our laws a farce.[39]

The second part of Decoud's analysis is immensely relevant today, not only to the newly emergent states of Latin America, but also to those in Africa and South-east Asia. Further, the idea of secession which was entirely Decoud's own seems to adumbrate prophetically the secessionist tendencies inherent in multi-cultural and multi-lingual nations as are so evident today.

Dr. Monygham, apart from Nostromo, is the most forceful political actor in the novel. Like Decoud, he shakes off his political detachment and plunges into the political conflict. Like Jim, his past life is tainted by an accidental weakness and the ghost of the past continues to haunt him. During the regime of Guzman Bento when, severely tortured by father Beron, he betrayed a group of friends. The doctor, too, is severely sceptical about human nature though his scepticism is experiential rather than assumed. The semi-colonial situation has maimed him in several ways. Monygham's obsession with his disgrace drives him to a self-imposed isolation from European society after another revolution has brought his unexpected release. Nevertheless, he is a man of great compassion,

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[39] Nostromo, p.171.

deeply sensitive to the sufferings and misfortunes of others. His love of the people is shown in the conscientious performance of his medical duties and, in particular, by his care of such individuals as the Violas. It is therefore, natural that he should be drawn towards Emilia, the only character of uncompromising humanity in the story and one who shares his concern for the basic welfare of the common people. Like Decoud, Dr. Monygham has no illusion about himself. He reacts nonchalantly to the chief engineer's assertion that life can be meaningful only through the spiritual value which everyone discovers in his own form of activity. He says :

> Self-flattery, food for that vanity which makes the world go round.... Put no spiritual value into my desires, or my opinions or my actions. They have not enough vastness to give me room for self-flattery.[40]

But the embittered doctor has discovered his social commmitment through the benign association of Mrs. Gould. His love for Mrs. Gould is expressed in thoughtful action and it may be pointed out that Monygham's love is the truest shown in the novel. He lands up in a dangerous game with Sotillo to buy time for the arrival of Barrios' forces. He misdirects Sotillo's energy by giving him

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[40] Nostromo, p.318.

the impression through various arguments and innuendoes that the silver is hidden either on the shore or buried in the sea. The suspense which turns on whether Monygham will be able to persuade Nostromo to recall the Cayetan regiment, is sustained through Conrad's wonderful narrative skill. When the doctor makes his loyalty to Mrs. Gould an obsession, he becomes potentially dangerous. We see him utterly indifferent to Decoud's fate. He never inquires what actually happened to Decoud and never bothers what a shock Decoud's death would be to Antonia. When he confronts Nostromo who has just returned after the sinking of the lighter, he does not think of him humanely, as a fellow creature just escaped from the jaws of death but merely as a tool to use in his scheme to save Mrs. Gould. His idea is, no doubt, selfless, but he is not free from passion ('the fanaticism of his devotion') which obsesses him and which produces events, which are supremely important. Sometimes he displays wonderful insights which makes F.R.Leavis regard him as the 'voice of sanity'[41] in the novel. Years later when Mrs. Gould wearily asks, "Will there never be any peace?", the doctor replies prophetically that there is no peace and no rest in the development of material interest because it is amoral, "founded on expediency and is inhuman."[42]

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[41] F.R.Leavis, The Great Tradition(London,1948), p.213.

[42] Nostromo, p.511.

In a society in pervasive economic and political disarray, the novelist creates an upright and dignified man in Nostromo-- a man who can be called the finest flower of the proletariat. The 'incorruptible capataz de Cargadores' cares for nothing except his own reputation. "He is content to feel himself a power within the people."[43] He neither longs to possess silver as Sotillo does, nor does he have a taste for luxurious living. The Costaguanan society gives him a good name and appreciates his valour and he always acts up to his reputation and always satisfies the expectation of his capitalist employers. His reckless generosity whether to the pretty Monerita for whom he cuts off the silver buttons of his coat in the full publicity of a fiesta or to the aged crone who receives his last dollar in the obscurity of the city corner, is nothing but the expression of his longing for the lustre of a prestigious name. This urges him to do wonderful feats. He is no ordinary self-seeker. Even his employer, Captain Mitchell, is forced to acknowledge that his usefulness far outweighs his wages. When he first leaves Decoud and is faced with the problem of resuming his life, he feels desperate because he has lost the reputation for which he lived. He realises for the first time that his

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[43] 'Author's Note', Nostromo, p.Xii

capitalist exploiters have constantly disregarded Nostromo the man in favour of his reputation. George Viola's words flash through his mind and illuminate the exploitative relation :

> What he heard Goeorge Viola say was very true. Kings, ministers, aristocrats, the rich in general kept the poor in poverty and subjection. They kept them as they kept dogs, to fight and hunt for their service.[44]

Abruptly cut off from the applause that had sustained his identity, he can only conclude, true to his own subjectivity, that this applause has been false, and the applauders traitors. This makes him conscious of his solitude; he becomes an alien in his own culture and among his own people. Where he had once transformed the whole population of Sulaco into a crowd of dazzled spectators, he is unable to seek the simple advice and reassurance he needs.

However, from the very beginning Nostromo's estrangement from his native society and culture is highlighted. His authority is devoid of any ethical sanction inasmuch as it does not represent the aspirations of his community. He does not realise that in serving the cause of the European imperialists, he is acting directly against the interest of his own people. His unreflective commitment to his capitalist masters indicates the

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[44] Nostromo, p.415.

way in which modern economic imperialists lure the best talents from underdeveloped communities and alienate them from their own culture and people. S.Raval explores this aspect of Nostromo's character and points out :

> Prior to his disintegration Nostromo's ethic is simply a moralistic appearance buoyed up by the network of political-economic interest he serves. The power of this network is in its ability to create a man of the people, for the people, and to make him serve values and interests neither the people, nor he, their idealised representative, would support.[45]

Thus, Nostromo is a hollow man; his being so is the price of his talent in his society at its particular moment in history. His disintegration brings knowledge to him and an awareness of the true nature of his relation with his masters. However, Nostromo's new knowledge does not bring in the necessary enlightenment which could have sent him to stand by his own people and defend his culture against the barbaric onslaughts both from inside and outside Costaguana. Rather it engenders corruption in him. Having withdrawn his trust in those people who have exploited him, he decides to keep the secret of the silver to himself and grow rich slowly. He becomes 'corruptible'.

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[45] S.Raval, The Art of Failure:Conrad's Fiction (Boston:Allen and Unwin,1986), p.85.

The scene of his death is highly suggestive with a "knot of night-prowlers -- the poorest of the poor"[46] hanging about the door of the hospital, and, with a pale Marxist photographer, "small, frail, blood-thirsty, the hater of capitalists",[47] watching him and trying to fish out from him secret information about the treasure to be brought again into the service of popular revolt.

Mrs. Gould is the embodiment of the human and humane principles in Nostromo. In her simplicity, she believes that the development of the mine is inevitably bound up with the amelioration of the people's woes. She likes to preserve the "simple and picturesque things"[48] in native society and culture but does not know how the conflict between tradition and technology could be resolved. She is saddened by the vision of a future in Costaguana stripped of its native traditions. She sardonically refers to the "religion of silver and iron"[49] in the very beginning of the actions in the novel and anticipates the ways in which economic interests are going to erode the quality of life in Costaguana. The new settlements have no individuality of their own; they are named Village One, Village Two and Village Three. The cultural life of the people has been

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[46] Nostromo, p.459.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., p.120.

[49] Ibid., p.71.

thoroughly disturbed: "There will be no more popular feasts held here."[50] The miners at the Campo have gained a secure way of life, but looking at their "flat, joyless faces"[51], dressed and housed identically, Mrs. Gould asks herself if they are really more happy now than when they were illiterate and impoverished peasants but, nevertheless, part of an intensely vital and throbbing human tradition.

Mrs. Gould, like her husband, began with the assumption that the material and moral successes are not only compatible, but necessarily related. Only slowly does she come to realise the dehumanising effects of silver on various characters. She sustained her faith in her husband's integrity and unerring instincts for as long as was possible, but the gradual transformation in his nature pained her greatly. She is jolted by the discovery that there is something inherent in the necessities of "successful action" that carried with it the "moral degradation of the idea."[52] Without any grumble, she withdraws herself from the public world of material interest and political intrigue to the private world of "her schools, her hospital, the sick mothers and the feeble old men, mere insignificant vestiges of the initial inspiration."[53] She is universally loved and

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[50] Nostromo, p.102

[51] Ibid., p.100.

[52] Ibid., p.521.

[53] Ibid., p.347.

admired. In the Casa Gould all the warmth of welcome is hers, and it takes on real warmth when time and again we see people expand in her presence -- Mitchell, Sir John, Dr. Monygham, the young homesick engineers and many others. She looks after the old Georgio Viola and her daughters like a Guardian Angel. When the rabble broke out and the life of all Europeans were at stake, Dr. Monygham observes :

> She thinks of the girl (Antonia)... the the Viola children ...me...the wounded ...the miners...everybody who is poor and miserable....No one seems to be thinking of her.[54]

In the early scenes, we see Mrs. Gould's unquestioning commitment to what she thought to be a shared ideal. Chales's gradual alienation drove her to the limits of despair. It was no small disenchantment to her to find that for Gould, loyalty to the silver mine has taken precedence over his social or domestic responsibilities. "She saw clearly the San Tome mine possessing, consuming, burning up the life of the last of the Goulds...."[55] Her repeated efforts to restore the initial rapport which could surely have been the basis of a meaningful relationship were thwarted by her husband's nonchalance and unwillingness to communicate with her.

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[54] Nostromo, p.380.

[55] Ibid., p.522.

The silver alienates Gould both from his wife and the people.

The ending of Nostromo is marked by an impression of futility and collective and individual losses and failures. Pursuit of material interest has destroyed the fabric of a rich and vital native tradition and substituted for it neither stability nor a commitment to the basic human values. The history of 'oppression and brutality' rooted in the colonial past of Costaguana and its imperialistic present becomes, in the ultimate analysis, a story of racial failure and cultural immaturity. At the end, the radicals are preparing for another revolution that they expect will usher in an era of justice and democracy. But the overwhelming impression is that unless the people are enlightened and initiated into the norms of democracy and decent life, every popular movement will continue to be tainted by the same defects and the prosperity of the land will ever remain a distant dream.

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Chapter-V

THE POLITICS OF THE TERRORISTS

C H A P T E R - V

THE POLITICS OF THE TERRORISTS

A STUDY OF THE SECRET AGENT AND THREE SHORT STORIES

The treatment of popular revolt and revolutionary intrigues in Nostromo amply indicated that Conrad was slowly moving towards new and hitherto unexplored terrains. From the familiar and favourite world of adventure at sea and tales exotic romance in distant lands, he was moving towards the world of surreptitious plots and outrages. This is evident from the short stories written between Nostromo and The Secret Agent. What is notable about this shift is his lack of any intimate acquaintance with the underworld of those plots and outrages. that were a product of the anarchist movement and the anarchists. In the letters written to his friends and publishers during the composition of The Secret Agent, Conrad continually pleads ignorance about the goings-on in the underworld and the seemingly intractable nature

of the material.

Yet Conrad was alert and active to what was happening around him, particularly if it had any bearing on Poland or Russia. In his letters written to Spiridon Kliszczewski, as early as in 1885, Conrad shows his awareness and concern for Polish matters. He comments happily on the defeat of the Liberal government, which followed a policy of friendship with Russia, in 1885 General Elections, anticipating from this the hope of improved relations with Germany, "the only power with whom an anti-Russian alliance would be useful, and even possible, for Great Britain."[1] However, this hope did not last long. He was terribly disappointed by the developments in England and his analysis of the situation is very perspicuous eventhough a little hasty: "The newly enfranchised idiots have satisfied the yearnings of Mr. Chamberlain's herd by cooking the national goose according to his recipe.... Joy reigns in St. Petersburg, no doubt, and profound disgust in Berlin."[2] In fact, Conrad's political utterances in the five or six odd letters written to Spiridon Kliszczewski about this time, make him appear both a reactionary and an arch-conservative. The second of these letters, written from Calcutta, contains one of his virulent diatribes against

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[1] G.Jean Aubry, Life and Letters I, p.80.

[2] Ibid., p.84.

the onslaught of social-democratic ideas as a result of the untimely extension of suffrage in England :

> Where's the man to stop the rush of social-democratic ideas? The opportunity and the day have come and are gone! England was the only barrier to the pressure of infernal doctrines born in continental back-slums.... Socialism must end in Caesarism.[3]

However, as he advanced in years, Conrad's political outlook became more mature and objective. Of course, throughout his life, he remained an anti-Russian and he never ceased to believe that nihilistic and anarchistic tendencies were ingrained in the Russian temperament under the Tsarist dispensations.

Although anarchism was largely a Russian movement in the nineteenth century, its impact was felt in Europe and England. The term 'anarchist' covered a wide range of ideologies and activities in the Victorian England. Prince Kropotkin, the anarchist philosopher of Russia made London his abode for sometime in the last decade of the nineteenth century and inflenced a group of highly placed and socially respectable persons. William Morris of the Pre-Raphaelite fame, was greatly inflenced by Kropotkin and founded an anarchist group in England. Bernard Shaw was another stout adherent.

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[3]G.Jean Aubry, Life and Letters, p.84.

The split between Marx and Bakunin resulted in the dissolution of the First International in 1876 and the revolutionary movement split into different factions. As regards anarchism, the great tradition of Godwin and Proudhon, continued by Bakunin and Kropotkin, it degenerated into terrorist tactics in the hands of lesser adherents. William Hyndman, the English interpreter of Marx, founded the Social Democratic Federation, which ran counter to the Marxist ideology and gradually developed into a proto-anarchist movement. Besides, large numbers of self-proclaimed anarchists from all over the world took refuge in London. The whole of Europe was terrified. There were a number of attempts on the lives of royalty and eminent statesmen. The assassination of the Queen of Austria, of the King of Italy, of the Presidents of France and the United States, of the Prime Minister of Spain were all attributed to anarchists.

Conrad was in France in 1894 about which time the anarchist-terrorist campaign reached its crescendo. If he had not absorbed its full impact at the time, his later association with Ford Madox Ford and Cunningham Graham must have had acquainted him with its workings. Moreover, temperamentally Conrad was inclined to see the world as 'anarchy', as a gigantic circus given over to acts of futility. "By Jove", he wrote to Graham,

"If I had the necessary talent, I would like to go for the true anarchist..."[4] This, however, should not be taken to mean an unqualified approval of the anarchist activities. As The Secret Agent and the short stories on the same theme demonstrate, his enthusiasm was qualified by critical reservations of a very serious kind. His fictional world is peopled with despicable shams and pretenders rather than true anarchists.

Conrad wrote a number of fairly long stories between the completion of Nostromo and the beginning of writing on The Secret Agent. Of these, three stories are relevant here, viz., "Gasper Ruiz", "An Anarchist" and "The Informer:An Ironic Tale".[5] They are important inasmuch as they show Conrad's continued preoccupation with the complex world of anarchy and political intrigue at this time. "Gasper Ruiz"is a spin off from Nostromo. It has the same ambience. The setting, again, is South America with a revolution in the ferment. The central character, Gasper Ruiz, also bears striking resemblance to Nostromo. He is strongly built and short of words; he is the favourite of his people and their natural leader. He is drawn to revolutionary warfare much against his wishes and is exploited by all political positions.

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[4]G.Jean Aubry, Life and Letters II, p.60.

[5]All these stories figure in the collection, A Set of Six. References are to the Collected Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad(London:J.M.Dent and sons Ltd., 1947)

Embroiled in the struggle between the Royalist and the Republican forces, Gasper Ruiz is used by both the parties and finally dies fighting against the Republicans. Nostromo, it may be recalled, supports the aristocratic class that keeps him down and fights the "rabble" who represent his own class. When he wakes up to the reality that the upper class merely exploited him, he reverses his sympathy and steals the silver from them. Gasper's predicament is the same. He is forced to fight for the Royalists against his own class; his own class ruthlessly exploits him when he rises to power. In the final analysis, the story is a parable of the inevitable impingement of political forces on unwilling and innocent individuals in modern times and the inescapable ruin that must follow such an eventuality.

"An Anarchist" is a disturbing tale replete with ambiguities. It has the germ of an idea that lacks crystallisation. The so-called anarchist of the story is, again, an innocent and unconcerned individual, Paul, who is an engineer by profession. He gets implicated in anarchism through a ridiculous accident. The police round him up for shouting anarchist slogans while drunk. In the trial, through the stupidity of an ambitious socialist lawyer, he gets sentenced for a long term. On his release, he looks for a job but does not find any. He

falls in with some anarchists, is convicted of bank robbery and gets transported to the penal settlement of St. Joseph's island, French Guiana. Here, the convicts in the whole settlement put up a mutiny and Paul, along with two of his comrades, Simon the Biscuit and Mafile, escapes. While on the escape-boat, Paul murders both of his comrades because, according to him, they are responsible for his abasement :

> I murdered their lies, their promises, their menaces, and all my days of misery. Why they could not have left me alone after I came out of prison?.... A black rage came upon me -- the rage of extreme intoxication.[6]

But the murder of his comrades does not bring him real liberty. Again he becomes a virtual prisoner in in a penal settlement condemned for cattle, the industrial estate of a meat-extract company. Paul's position is exploited there by the manager. Thus he is a victim of both anarchism and capitalism. As a story, "An Anarchist" lacks maturity, but it clearly marks a step forward towards the technique and attitude that Conrad was to adopt in The Secret Agent.

"The Informer:An Ironic Tale" is the most significant among the stories on the theme under discussion. The anonymous narrator is a collector of Chinese bronzes and porcelain. He has a friend in Paris who is a

[6] A Set of Six, pp.158-9.

curious collector, not of "porcelain, nor of bronzes, nor pictures, nor medals, nor stamps" -- but of "acquaintances".[7] This friend introduces the narrator to Mr. X, who is both a notorious anarchist -- "the mysterious and unknown Number One of desperate conspiracies" and also an "enlightened Connoisseur of bronzes and china."[8] The narrator takes Mr. X, who has come to visit him, through his collection of curios after which both of them sit down to an elaborate and elegant dinner. During the meal, the anarchist tells the narrator a story of underground intrigue and betrayal involving the Hermione street group of anarchists in London. It seems that a double agent, Sevrin, has somehow infiltrated this anarchist group and passes out all information relating to its clandestine activities to police. As a result, all the anarchist conspiracies end in miscarriages and failures. The anarchists at the centre in Brussels are worried and have sent Comrade X to London to investigate the case and meet the "young Lady Amateur of anarchism".[9] Comrade X stages a mock police raid on the Hermione Street premises and the secret agent Sevrin is tricked into revealing his real identity. Sevrin admits that he has betrayed his fellow revolutionaries

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[7] A Set of Six, p.73.

[8] Ibid., p.74.

[9] Ibid., p.81.

'through conviction' and poisons himself. One of the aspects of the story has been analysed by R.A.Gekoski in the following manner: "The story... gains some impact through the device of assuming the values of anarchism to be the norm, and the'betrayal' of the informer to be an aberration from accepted behaviour."[10] Comrade X, however, narrates the story to drive home the point that much of the support for the anarchist movement comes from the very class the anarchists are out to destroy : "Don't you know yet ... that an idle and selfish class loves to see mischief being made , even if it is made at its own expense?"[11] Comrade X is critical of the lady anarchist who, according to him, is an irresponsible amateur, surveying the world from her upper class ivory tower of "accomplished and innocent gestures", of "conventional signs", and "the consummate and hereditary grimaces that in a certain sphere of life take the place of feelings."[12] The class identity of the anarchists is held up for scrutiny by Conrad, but it is not free from ambiguity; because Comrade X himself "belonged to a noble family and could have called himself Victome X de la Z if he chose."[13] His hobbies and bearings are no less aristocratic. He was a collector of bronze and china

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[10]R.A.Gekoski, Conrad:The Moral World of the Novelist (London:Paul Elek,1978), p.139.

[11]A Set of Six, p.78.

[12]Ibid., p.81.

[13]Ibid., p.78.

and took his meals in exclusive restaurants. Of course, Comrade X is no amateur; he is a deadly professional, a messenger of chaos, ("There is no amendment to be got out of mankind except by terror and violence")[14], an impostor and a secret agent hiding his anarchist allegiance beneath the impeccable refinement and his fame as a revolutionary writer.

One important aspect illustrated in these stories is that the anarchists are not unusual or extraordinary human beings. In The Secret Agent, the purpose of the sub-title, 'A Simple Tale' seems to remind the readers how simple men really are even when they are the destroyers of society or their pursuers. One is struck to see how narrow a gulf exists between ordinary law-abiding citizens and the maker of bombs. In "The Informer", the narrator is "a quiet and peaceable product of civilisation";[15] Comrade X is the world's dreaded terrorist. And yet the two are very much alike in their habits and tastes. In fact, there is a suggestion that there are secret affinities between the narrator and Comrade X, just as Marlow, in a moment of epiphany, discovers his affinity with Mr. Kurtz. However, in the anarchist stories, Conrad also introduces popular beliefs about the

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[14] A Set of Six, p.77.

[15] Ibid., p.76.

anarchists that set them apart from ordinary human beings. The narrator in "The Informer" muses :

> Anarchists, I suppose, have no families .... Organisation into families may answer to a need of human nature, but in the last instance it is based on law, and therefore must be odious and impossible to an anarchist .... Does a man of that persuasion still remain an anarchist when alone, quite alone and going to bed for instance?[16]

The other important aspect of the story "The Informer" consists in the fact that it anticipates in significant ways the events and techniques in two of the major political novels -- The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes. Both these novels have as their central figure a secret agent who infiltrates groups of revolutionaries and anarchists and who is in the end exposed and either tortured or killed. More specifically, the character of the professor, the perfect anarchist in The Secret Agent, seems only a slight variation on Comrade X of "The Informer". In Under Western Eyes, it is not any character but the technique of narration itself that bears resemblance to that of "The Informer". The narrator in both cases is a sensible and civilised gentleman of European culture and the significance of events filters through his consciousness.

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[16] A Set of Six, p.75.

The stories discussed above may be said to have prepared Conrad sufficiently for a detailed and sustained treatment of anarchy in The Secret Agent. The actual incident on which the narrative hinges is, however, taken from real life, namely, the Greenwich Bomb Outrage that took place in 1894. There is general agreement that this is the source of The Secret Agent. In the 'Author's Note' to the novel, Conrad alludes to an 'omniscient friend' presumably Ford Madox Ford, and says that the tale, "came to me in the shape of a few words uttered by a friend in a casual conversation about anarchists or rather anarchist activities."[17] He also refers to the reading of the "rather summary recollections of an Assistant Commisioner of police".[18] Of course, Conrad certainly had other sources for secret political interference by foreign powers. He wrote to Cunningham Graham in his letter of 7 Oct., 1907: "Mr. Vladimir was suggested to me by that scoundrel, General Seliwerstow, whom Padlewski shot (in Paris) in the '90s .... There were peculiar circumstances in that case."[19] Besides, as was always the case with Conrad, his knowledge about anarchist activities must have been supplemented by his readings of anarchist publications of the kind sold by Verloc in his shop: "... a few apparently old copies of

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[17] 'Author's Note', The Secret Agent (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.XXXIII.

[18] Ibid., p.XXXV.

[19] G.J.Aubry, Life and Letters II, p.60.

obscure newspapers badly printed, with titles like The Torch, The Gong --rousing titles".[20]

Conrad's exposition of the Greenwich Bomb Outrage bears striking resemblance to the actual event. The actual perpetrator of the outrage was one Martial Bourdin who did indeed blow himself up like Stevie, his fictional counterpart. The police report describes Bourdin as having been "inadequately developed" and having "silky hair"; we find Stevie possessing the same attributes. Further, the Greenwich explosion was seen by the English Press as a foreign effort to force the British Governmnt to stop harbouring revolutionaries. In the novel, the Greenwich Observatory episode is instigated by an official of a foreign embassy while an anti-anarchist conference was in the offing in Milan. The purpose was to malign the anarchists who took refuge in England and thus compel the British Government to take stringent measures against them.

Verloc, the secret agent is a man of uncertain foreign extraction and dubious antecedents. He is a typical Conradian character -- effete and indolent, lacking vitality or initiative. He may be said to be the direct

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[20] The Secret Agent, p.3.

descendent of Almayer, the lethargic dreamer: "His eyes were naturally heavy; he had an air of having wallowed, fully dressed, all day on an unmade bed."[21] There is a 'mean aspect' to the life lived by the Verlocs at the Bret street in Soho. The atmosphere is slimy, shabby and dismal. There is an uncanny air about Verloc's pornography shop with its 'shady wares' and mysterious evening visitors. Conrad posits the conflict between Verloc's private and public values in the very first chapter: "... he carried on his business of a seller of shady wares, exercised his vocation of a protector of society and cultivated his domestic virtues."[22]

Verloc has been in London for about eleven years in the employ of a foreign embassy (probably Russian). He was the most trusted secret agent during the time of Baron Stott-Wartenheim, so secret that he was never designated by name, but by the symbol delta. His "warnings had the power to change the schemes and the dates of royal, imperial, and grand ducal journeys, and sometimes cause them to be put off altogether!"[23] But Verloc is, in fact, a double agent. He is at once the confidant of and a sort of guide to the anarchist

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[21] The Secret Agent, p.4.

[22] Ibid., p.5.

[23] Ibid., p.27.

revolutionaries and a police informer. The foreign embassy has been paying him regularly for his act of espionage and yet he is paid and protected by the police. Ideologically, Verloc is committed to neither side. He sees his work, it is true, in terms of the "vocation of a protector of society";[24] but he does it not out of loyalty to the concept of social order, but because "protection is the first necessity of opulence and luxury."[25] There is no indication that he seriously believes that the fissiperous elements upon whose activities he reports present any real threat to the present order; "... at the notion of a menaced social order he would perhaps have winked to himself if there had not been an effort to make in that sign of scepticism".[26] He is a double agent because he has discovered that he can eke out an easy and comfortable living by playing the two contending sides against each other -- fostering radical activities while generating reactionary fears.

Thus, Verloc's position is a precarious one. The protection of the existing social order is a condition of his own security, but this can be maintained as long as his activities in both spheres, with both the

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[24] The Secret Agent, p.5.

[25] Ibid., p.12.

[26] Ibid.

reactionaries and the radicals, does not take any definitive shape. That is, he must always maintain a delicate balance taking care not to provoke repressive measures by his employers that could possibly suppress anarchist activities against which he reports, or to allow his anarchist comrades to effectively build up an assault that might succeed in disrupting the social order upon which his comforts depend. In other words, he must remain ineffectual. The paradoxical nature of his position is reflected in Mr. Vladimir's reaction to Verloc's appearance of well-fed comfort and complacency. For all his 'air of moral nihilism', Verloc "looked uncommonly like a master plumber come to present his bill."[27] He is, in addition, married, a manifestation of conventional stability that reduces his credibility as an anarchist. Mr. Vladimir leaps on this admission of normality by Verloc and refuses to believe any such fib : "Anarchists don't marry.... They can't. It would be apostasy.... Why, you must have discredited yourself completely in your own world by your marriage."[28]

Yet, Verloc has not discredited himself with any of the parties. Like Nostromo, he has a reputation almost unassailable. He mixes freely with the

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[27] The Secret Agent, p.27

[28] Ibid., p.36.

anarchists who use his shop as a meeting place. His relationship with Heat, the Chief Inspector of police, is also quite cordial though as a matter of policy, they meet rarely. Verloc's reputation, like Nostromo's is the mainstay of his livelihood. It appears from his conversation with Mr. Vladimir that he has been in the pay of the embassy for eleven years. But as his original ambassadorial patron is dead now, his position is threatened. Mr. Vladimir, the First Secretary, a man with a "mocking, cynical manner" is not happy with Verloc's performance and mocks his claim to political sophistication. He makes caustic personal remarks on Verloc's corpulence and lethargy. Verloc makes a feeble attempt to defend himself, but without much confidence. He claims that he has a remarkable voice that proved an asset in his assignments and that he speaks French fluently. In addition, he is one of the vice presidents of the F.P., i.e., The Future of the Proletariat, a society "not anarchist in principle, but open to all shades of revolutionary opinion."[29] Vladimir is unimpressed and continues in his half-mocking, half-threatening strain. He accuses Verloc of ineffectuality: "You give yourself as an agent provocateur. The proper business of an agent provocateur is to provoke. As far

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[29]The Secret Agent, p.26.

as I can judge from your record kept here, you have done nothing to earn your money for the last three years."[30] Eventually, he confronts Verloc with the ultimatum, 'no work, no pay' that sends cold shivers down Verloc's spine.

After effectively threatening Verloc, Vladimir puts forward his plan of action before him. His plan is designed to shock the British out of their laxity and the policy of indulgence to anarchists by bringing about a series of outrages, not necessarily sanguinary, but effectively terrifying. Vladimir dismisses attack on Royalty or religion because, according to him, they are no longer held in reverence by the people. What is sacred to the middle class and the bourgeoisie is science and property which constitute the foundation of modern civilisation. So the outrage must be directed against scientific property: "You anarchists should make it clear that you are perfectly determined to make a clean sweep of the whole social creation."[31] If Verloc wants to retain his job, he must destroy the "first meridian". Nothing short of this colossal absurdity will do. Vladimir who is a hard-headed anarchist in his mind knows better than any one else the ultimate terror of

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[30] The Secret Agent, p.25.

[31] Ibid., p.32.

nihilism and the psychological impact of his scheme :

> ...what is one to say to an act of destructive ferocity so absurd as to be incomprehensible, almost unthinkable; in fact mad? Madness alone is truely terrifying, inasmuch as you cannot placate it either by threats, persuasion or bribes.[32]

Verloc's cohorts are Michaelis, Alexander Ossipon, the Professor and Kurl Yundt -- a bunch of ineffectual anarchists, rather one dimensional figures. The only thing they share in common is that all of them, with the possible exception of the Professor, are lazy and parasitical, depending on the conventions and normality of ordinary social life they condemn. They have an aversion to work and live on the credulity of other people. Ideologically, their position is rather vague. Conrad does not give them differentiating political labels, though he sometimes lets the dialogue indicate several positions. Michaelis can be described as a visionary Marxist whereas Yundt seems to be a crude follower of Bakunin. Ossipon has a narrowly materialistic view of science which does not bear much scrutiny. In the scheme of the novel, as Edward Garnett points out, "... These character sketches supply us with a working analysis of anarchism that is profoundly true, though the

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[32] The Secret Agent, p.33.

philosophical anarchism of certain creative mind is, of course, out of the range of the author's survey."[33]

In The Secret Agent anarchism is rèpresented in its extreme form by the Professor who knows no other language than that of violence. Conrad introduces him in Chapter Four as a shabby little man in spectacles. His conversation with Ossipon reveals that he is an explosive expert who is prepared 'in principle' to give explosives to anyone that asks him for them. He is unhappy about the way of life, "... which, in this connection, is a historical fact surrounded by all sorts of restraints and considerations",[34] has circumscribed Man and has resulted in the evolution of the "condemned social order".[35] The Professor is oppressed by human limitations and endeavours to do away with them by destroying the whole social order that is responsible for those limitations. By sheer force of personality and singleness of purpose, the Professor has made himself secure from the police and his enemies. They know that he always keeps "the last handful of his wares"[36] in his pocket, and his finger on a rubber ball which can detonate that package. This is enough to blow himself and

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[33]Norman Sherry, ed., Conrad:The Critical Heritage (Routledge & Kegan Paul,1973), p.192.

[34]The Secret Agent, p.68.

[35]Ibid., p.71.

[36]Ibid., p.65

whoever comes in his contact to pieces. The Professor is secure in the knowledge that "they know". The only thing that plagues him is the fact that the whole process takes not less than twenty seconds which, according to him, is too long an interval to make the strategy foolproof. Hence he is fiercely dedicated to the business of making the perfect detonator, a task that is of supreme importance to him.

In his letter of Oct. 7, 1907, to Cunningham Graham, Conrad says that he endeavoured to invest the Professor with " a note of perfect sincerity".[37] The Professor is seriously committed to the values he professes. In contrast to the other idle anarchists, he works fourteen hours a day and sometimes goes hungry.[38] His criticism of other anarchists springs from this absolute dedication to his mission :

> You (revolutionists) plan the future, you lose yourself in reveries of economical systems derived from what is; whereas what is wanted is a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life. That sort of life will take care of itself if you make room for it.[39]

The Professor holds the view that a society whose foundations are unjust has no right to survive. He believes

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[37] G.Jean Aubry, Life andLetters II, p.60

[38] The Secret Agent, pp.69-70.

[39] Ibid., p.73.

that it can be destroyed and made over again according to the ideas of perfect justice. His fanatical obsession with destruction has its basis in this belief. Inspite of the lack of moderation in his views, the Professor offers authentic insights into some aspects of society and makes a genuinely devastating criticism of its inner contradictions. As he points out, the democratic tradition of liberalism may tolerate all forms of radicalism but deprive the radicals of any pressing desire for revolutionary action. He advocates "madness and despair"[40] as a lever to move the world because,democratic tolerance and indulgence makes for the gradual emasculation of the anarchists. The Professor refers to Ossipon himself and his comrades as illustrations. To Ossipon's exasperated question, "What do you want from us?" the Professor answers without batting an eyelid, " A perfect detonator."[41]

The Professor displays keen insight into the way society harbours antagonistic elements. This insight helps him to see the identicality of the policeman and the terrorist so far as their nature and function in a conventional society are concerned: " The policeman and the terrorist both come from the same basket.

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[40] The Secret Agent, p.309.

[41] Ibid., p.69.

Revolution, legality -- countermoves in the same game; forms of idleness at bottom identical."[42] Oppressed by the lethargy and quietism around him, the Professor evolves an attitude that will enable him to lead a life of absolute sincerity, shorn of all illusions. When Ossipon asks, "What remains?", he replies with determination, " I remain -- if I am strong enough."[43] He is perfectly aware of the revolutionary goal while others are not. It is for this reason that he does not play at being an anarchist.

One may pick loopholes in the Professor's seemingly invincible logic of destruction. He is too fanatically obsessed with his ideology to put it in critical perspective. His fierce commitment to his ideology loses credibility because it springs, to a great extent, from his failures in the academic and financial spheres. We are told that he began his life as "an assistant demonstrator in chemistry at some technical institute" and greatly struggled to "raise himself in the social scale."[44] But the society had neither acknowledged nor rewarded his "genius". To see his ambition thwarted opened his eyes "to the true nature of the world, whose morality was artificial, corrupt and blasphemous."[45] If

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[42] The Secret Agent, p.69

[43] Ibid., p.304.

[44] Ibid., p.75

[45] Ibid., p.81.

his ambitions were not thwarted, his perceptions of the world could have been different. Thus the origins of his radical discontent and the ideology constituted on that edifice put into question his sincerity and integrity. Conrad generalises on the experiences of the Professor to comment on the real sources of most revolutions: "The way even the most justifiable revolutions is prepared by personal impulses disguised into creeds."[46] The stature of the Professor reduces considerably in our eyes when Conrad observes :

> ... in their own way the most ardent of revolutionaries are perhaps doing no more but seeking peace in common with the rest of mankind - the peace of soothed vanity, of satisfied appetites, or perhaps of appeased conscience.[47]

The most vocal critic of the Professor is Alexander Ossipon who is scared stiff of the Professor's enthusiasm for destruction. Ossipon is a former medical student who has been drawn to anarchism because it ensures a life of ease and idleness. Like Verloc, he is averse to work and does not want to endanger his safety by participating in any form of decisive action. The repeated emphasis on his 'robustness' emphasises by contrast his love of comfort and ineffectuality and puts into ironic relief his vocation of making a living by sponging off

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[46] The Secret Agent, p.81.

[47] Ibid.

young women only too happy to associate themselves with a handsome man. His conversation with the Professor in Chapter Four reveals the essential difference between the two men. Ossipon cannot think that a peaceable man like Verloc could make such an audacious attempt as to explode the first meridian. For an anarchist, Ossipon lacks intelligence and perspicacity. He thinks that Verloc's shop is a paying concern and he maintains his family through it. He has never thought as to why Verloc always seems to elude the grasp of police which makes him a terribly sloppy revolutionary.

Ossipon is also single-minded like the Professor, though his single-mindedness consists only in preserving his own self-interest. He is not at all sorry for his comrade Verloc, but anxious about his own future, because "if this affair eventuated in the stoppage of the modest subsidy for the publication of the F.P. pamphlets"[48], he will be in trouble. He is also mortally afraid about the police action as a result of the explosion and his only thought is how to dissociate himself from any supposed complicity with it. "You may take it as you like", he tells the Professor, "but under the circumstances the only policy for the militant revolutionary group is to disclaim all connection with this

[48] *The Secret Agent*, p.77.

damned freak of yours. How to make the disclaimer convincing enough is what bothers me."[49] For the first time in life Ossipon is called upon to take some initiative as opposed to hollow talking and pamphleteering, and he is puzzled. Like Verloc, he is caught unawares by the unpredictable logic of events and lacks the necessary courage and commitment to decide on a definite course of action. The narrator's comment that the "even tenor" of Ossipon's "revolutionary life"[50] was menaced by no fault of his, is replete with irony and emphasises the dichotomy between his proclaimed commitment and the actuality of his life. He can think of no possible way out of his predicament, and the Professor, aware of his pimpish disposition, advises him banteringly to fasten himself to an exploitable woman. Ossipon was, in fact, thinking of Winnie in such a light at that moment, now that she is free (as he wrongly believes),and the Professor's advice startles him.

Ossipon's quietism and the Professor's fanaticism are too extremes of the revolutionary spectrum. If the former is absolutely unworthy of his assumed role because of inaction, the latter is consumed with a passion for action and wants to destroy people's faith in legality and conventional concepts of right and wrong.

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[49] The Secret Agent, p.77.

[50] Ibid.,p.78

Ossipon accuses the 'little man' of complicity with Verloc for handing out high explosives to him and thus putting into jeopardy the future of anarchists in England. But the Professor does not have an iota of regard for whatever Ossipon and his comrades have been doing, taking their cue from the Central Red Committee. He does not care for whatever happens to them or him individually. He is a thorough nihilist. The highly charged dialogue sparked off by Ossipon's description of the bomb-throwing incident as 'criminal' shows the essential difference between the two :

> "Criminal! What is that? What is crime? What can be the meaning of such an assertion?"
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> "How am I to express myself? One must use the current words", said Ossipon impatiently.
>
> "... the condemned social order has not been built up on paper and I don't fancy any combination of ink and paper will ever put an end to it....Yes, I would give the stuff to every man, woman or fool that likes to come along. I would see you all hounded out of here , or arrested -- or beheaded for that matter -- without turning a hair. What happens to us individually is not of the least consequence."[51]

Further, though it is the Professor who has been striving hard to evoke 'madness and despair' and create a wholly new social order out of it, it is the ineffectual Ossipon who comes into the presence of real madness and

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[51] The Secret Agent, pp.71-2.

despair when he meets Winnie after she has killed her husband. The result, far from moving the world, as predicted by the Professor, was merely to drive Winnie, a simple woman, to suicide.

In his letter to Cunningham Graham on Feb. 18, 1899, Conrad makes a clear distinction between the anarchist who wants to destroy the whole fabric of society and the "peace man"[52] who believes that all men are brothers and naively directs all his endeavours for the establishment of fraternity among them. Conrad shows his appreciation for the anarchist position because it is clear and sincere while the other is "impracticable" and "tends to weaken national sentiment." In The Secret Agent, it is only the professor who comes close to the anarchist position articulated above. The other anarchists show a combination of attitudes, running counter to each other and sometimes, in conflict with their professed aim. For example, we have Michaelis who is "a representative anarchist while being in origin part Fenian, part anarchist, and part socialist."[53] Unlike other anarchists in the novel, Michaelis's portrayal is rich with suggestions of innocence and saintliness, a reminder, perhaps, of Prince Kropotkin and his faith in

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[52]G.Jean Aubry, Life and Letters I, p.268.

[53]Norman Sherry, Conrad's Western World, p.260.

the innate goodness of humanity.

Michaelis is out of prison on ticket-of-leave. In his youth, he got sentenced because of a disinterested act of courage. His participation in a rather crazy attempt to rescue some prisoner from a police van resulted in his getting a life sentence. Though the original scheme was to rescue the prisoners by overpowering the escort, during the scuffle, one of the constables got shot and died, living behind 'a wife and three children'. This accidental death of the policeman aroused a furious outburst of indignation against the rescuers and "a raging, implacable pity for the victim."[54] The popular sentiment, coupled with Michaelis's own sincerity in expressing his feelings, contributed to his getting the life sentence, a punishment out of all proportion with his trivial part in the operation. After his conditional release, by a strange reversal of popular sentiment, he has become a hero, himself a "victim" of police excesses. His public image as a symbol of suffering and his eloquence as a speaker, ensures his popularity with the audience. Ossipon, threatened with the danger of reprisal after the bomb outrage thinks of putting him as a speaker before the public to enlist their sympathy: "I must lay hands on Michaelis at once, and

[54] The Secret Agent, p.106.

get him to speak from his heart at one of our gatherings. The public has a sentimental regard for that fellow."[55]

In The Secret Agent, Conrad shows how Marxist activities operate in a bourgeois society. In Michaelis, we see how Marxism has left varied impacts on different types of revolutionists. His prison life has brought about significant physical and mental changes in him. From an ordinary locksmith, he is transformed into an apostle:

> Nothing that happened to him individually had any importance. He was like those saintly men whose personality is lost in the contemplation of their faith. His ideas were not in the nature of convictions. They were inaccessible to reasoning. They formed in all their contradictions and obscurities an invincible and humanitarian creed ...[56]

As opposed to Ossipon's pseudo-scientific attitude, Michaelis's convictions are not amenable to reason. He is a simple soul, a benign humanitarian who feels out of place in the anarchist circle of London and seeks his refuge in the drawing room of his Lady Patroness who is profoundly impressed by the "sterling quality of his optimism."[57]

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[55] The Secret Agent, pp.77-8.

[56] Ibid., p.107.

[57] Ibid.

Michaelis is concerned not with the destruction of society but with the rectification of the economic system. Though there is a Marxist flavour to his analysis of capitalism, his views are too simplistic and mystical to be called truly Marxist:

> He saw capitalism doomed in its cradle, born with the poison of the principle of competition in its system. The great capitalists devouring the little capitalists, concentrating the power and the tools of production in great masses, perfecting industrial processes, and in the madness of self-aggrandisement only preparing, organising, enriching, making ready the lawful inheritance of the suffering proletariat.[58]

His sense of economic determinism predicts a glorious future for the common people. His vision of future is that of a classless society where the strong will devote themselves to the nursing of the weak. Given his theory of inevitable changes that are to take over for a rearrangement of the present order, Michaelis leaves little scope for action for the anarchists. To Ossipon's question about the irrelevance of any concerted effort, Michaelis responds by pointing out the great importance of revolutionary propaganda. The argument is not devoid of his characteristic eloquence :

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[58] The Secret Agent, p.49.

> 'Then it is no use doing anything -- no use whatever'.
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> 'I don't say that', protested Michaelis, gently.... Preparation of the future was necessary! ... he argued that revolutionary propaganda was a delicate work of high conscience. It was the education of the masters of the world. It should be as careful as the education given to the kings.[59]

However, Michaelis's stature as a thinker and anarchist philosopher is hemmed in by serious disclaimers. We are told that he has lost the power of thinking coherently. With delighted self-absorption, he is writing about his experiences in the prison, his words floating in the air without ever touching reality. His communications with his patroness are like "the efforts at moral intercourse between the inhabitants of remote planets."[60] They are touching in their 'foredoomed futility'. Besides, Michaelis is pathetic in his obesity, always associated in Conrad with stupidity and senility. He came out of the prison "round like a tub, with an enormous stomach and distended cheeks"[61] as if the government had stuffed him, with a vengeance, with fattening food. His "round and obese body seemed to float low between the chairs."[62] By investing Michaelis with such ludicrous features, Conrad ironically undercuts his

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[59] The Secret Agent, pp.49-50.

[60] Ibid., p.108.

[61] Ibid., p.53.

[62] Ibid.

stature and makes him as ordinary and ineffectual as the other anarchists. The ambiguity in his views is indicative of the confusion that was inherent in the anarchist movement.

Kurl Yundt represents the degeneration of anarchist movement into pure terrorism. He is the most repulsive of the sham revolutionaries. He is "old and bald, with a narrow snow-white wisp of a goatee hanging limply from his chin."[63] He aspires for freedom from the tendency to resigned pessimism which, he believes, rots the world. Conrad tells us that Yundt has been a great actor in his time, on public platforms and in secret assemblies, but who has never, surprisingly, put his theories into practice; Yundt has never raised "his little finger against the social edifice."[64] Habituated to speak in violent and melodramatic terms, Yundt represents the stereotype of the extreme terrorist of the popular imagination. His description of the branding by red-hot iron and skin burning and sizzling drives Stevie to a state of frenzy. Michaelis's passivity infuriates Yundt. A simulator to the core, he has the peculiar gift of making blood-curdling statements. Like Peter Ivanovitch in Under Western Eyes, Yundt suffers from megalomania and a tendency to the melodramatic :

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[63] The Secret Agent, p.42.

[64] Ibid., p.48.

> 'I have always dreamt', he mouthed fiercely, 'of a band of man absolute in their resolve to discard all scruples in the choice of means, strong enough to give themselves frankly the name of destroyers, ...No pity for anything on earth, including themselves, and death enlisted for good and all in the service of humanity.[65]

Yundt's idea of a revolutionary is the one unruffled by any scruples of pity or morality to destruction for the restructuring of human society. The pity is that he cannot get even "three such men together."[66] Yundt's oral violence is at variance with his physical degeneration. He is a 'moribund murderer' with 'worn out' passions. His shivering hands, toothless gums, perched throat and gouty swellings point to his utter senility. In the scheme of the novel, Yundt reinforces, along with Michaelis and Ossipon, the futility and ineffectuality of anarchism.

In The Secret Agent, Conrad's political insight extends into the internal workings of the statecraft. His treatment of the home-secretary Sir Ethelred, though slightly pompous, is realistic enough and is based on the biography of Sir William Harcourt. Sir Ethelred's impatience with details and insistence on lucidity is characteristic of the simplification resorted to in

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[65] The Secret Agent, p.42.

[66] Ibid., p.43.

day-do-day politics. He is not concerned with the legitimacy of means or the process of an enquiry, but with its final results only. A typical political figure, he considers each new step to be a revolutionary one. For the present, he has concentrated all his energies on the nationalisation of fisheries. His liaison with the underworld is maintained through Inspector Heat who keeps him informed about anarchist activities. Heat reassured Sir Ethelred only a few days ago that all the anarchists are accounted for and that there is no danger of any outrage from them. Quite reasonably 'the grear personage' is incensed by the bomb-throwing incident. Nevertheless, he is not interested in the details of such a sordid affair but simply wants the problem solved. The parody of this political figure matches the parody of the anarchists.

Chief Inspector Heat is the principal expert in anarchist procedure. He is a competent police officer, pragmatic and unimaginative. He is perfectly aware of the delicacy and difficulty involved in his job: " A given anarchist may be watched inch by inch and minute by minute, but a moment always comes when somehow all sight and touch of him are lost for a few hours, during which something (generally an explosion) more or less

deplorable occurs."[67] He prefers burglars whom he can understand and deal with to the anarchists whose rejection of all legality and norms seems to him sheer lunacy. His answer as to how to come to grip with the phenomenon, if he is allowed to do so, is straightforward but simplistic and brutal: "Terrorists ought to be shot at sight like mad dogs."[68] Heat and his superiors believe in the essential justice of democratic political institutions and their concern is to protect and preserve them. The Home Secretary and the Assistant Commissioner recognise that there is social injustice and believe that these institutions will help in the gradual amelioration of the social iniquities. Of course, their actions contribute little towards the achivement of this goal. Sir Ethelred is obsessed with his own revolution (nationalisation of fisheries) and the Assistant Commissioner is permanently worried by his wife's banality and petty jealousies. They have nothing substantial to offer against the insanity and despair of the political world of The Secret Agent.

The bureaucracy and the police in The Secret Agent cannot operate without taking recourse to underhand methods. Heat's effectiveness depends on the secret

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[67] The Secret Agent, p.85.

[68] Ibid., p.95.

agent Verloc who sells him information. The Assistant Commissioner's observation that "the reputation of Chief Inspector Heat might possibly have been made in a great part by the secret agent Verloc"[69] is perspicuous. The police and the secret agent are mutually sustaining. Verloc's information helps Heat to keep a firm grip on the situation and pre-empt any move by the anarchists. In return, Heat extends Verloc the much-needed police protection so that he can operate freely. This paradox of order fails when Verloc commits the bomb outrage. He could not possibly inform Heat about a plot of which he himself is the real architect. As Heat comes to know the real story, he is much worried about the problems that would be raised by Verloc's inevitable arrest and the attendant exposure of their secret liaison. Not only that a useful source of information is permanently lost, but Heat would be hard put to defend himself in the face of adverse publicity. Hence his 'unofficial' advice to Verloc to clear out. He could disappear easily because people think that it was Verloc who was killed at Greenwich.

The Secret Agent is a searching scrutiny of the fissures not only in political institutions, but in the social and domestic spheres as well. In it Conrad

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[69] The Secret Agent, p.143.

undertakes to explore some of the bleak and disturbing aspects of life ashore, setting his locale right in the centre of civilisation -- the urban England. Conrad seems to suggest that like Congo, London is another heart of darkness eventhough it has all pretentious claim to civilisation and progress. The London of the novel is essentially Dickensian in its shabbiness, vulgarity and social injustice. Mrs. Neale, the charwoman, Winnie Verloc, Stevie and their mother and the cab-driver illustrate the murky social iniquities in different ways. Like the sub-human denizens of the 'vile den' in Under Western Eyes, Mrs. Neale is a symbol of the dehumanisation of human form in The Secret Agent. During the cab-ride when Stevie asks the cab driver not to whip the horses because, "it hurts",[70] the cabby explains that he must treat his horse cruelly in order to provide his family, his "missus and four kids at 'ome"[71] with bread. Stevie is so much disturbed that the declaration "seemed to strike the world dumb."[72] His compressed response represents the reaction of men with clear-sighted vision and sympathy to much of the social and other injustices in the novel :

> ... he came to a stop with an angry splutter: "Shame!" Stevie was no master of

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[70] The Secret Agent, p.157.

[71] Ibid., p.166.

[72] Ibid., p.167.

> phrases.... But he felt with greater completeness and some profundity.[73]

Stevie utters the simple truth,- "Bad world for poor people."[74] But the simple statement conceals a profound reality. The professed anarchists who should have attacked this reality are governed by megalomania and expediency. It falls upon the shoulder of the existentialist 'outsider' and 'crippled' Stevie to provide the narrative with some kind of moral lever.

Conrad lashes at the bourgeois pretension to civilisation and culture. He puts into Vladimir's mouth a question almost devastating in its implication when he makes him ask, "I suppose you agree that the middle class are stupid?"[75] and when Verloc replies, "They are," we are left with no doubt that Conrad necessarily shares the opinion of the two men. The middle class, with their elaborate paraphernalia of police and civil administration allow the social iniquities to perpetuate. Conrad reveals the contradiction inherent in the attitude of the upper classes through the lesson Winnie teaches Stevie when he asks her to explain the function of the police: "They are there so that them as have nothing should not take anything from them who have."[76] Quite reasonably, Stevie asks the moot question of the

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[73] The Secret Agent, p.167.

[74] Ibid., p.171.

[75] Ibid., p.29.

[76] Ibid., p.173.

revolutionary; "What? ... Not even if they were hungry? Mustn't they?"[77] and Winnie answers, "Not if they were ever so."[78] This is the kind of rock-bottom justice that Conrad explodes in his analysis of the English society.

The socio-political and cultural vision presented in the novel is essentially bleak and depressing. This is due to the total lack of any sincere commitment to social justice on the part of any character except Stevie. Conrad clearly articulates the corruption and utter hollowness of some of the seemingly civilised values that are taken for granted in the Western society. At the same time, he shows the inadequacy of the revolutionary action that is called for to destroy these values. He is as harsh towards revolutionaries as he is towards governmental institutions both of which he dismisses with the cynical disillusionment of an artist confronted with the dismal state of affairs in the contemporary world. At the end we are left with only 'madness and despair'.

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[77] The Secret Agent, p.173.
[78] Ibid.

Chapter-VI

SALVO-TARTAR BYZANTINE BARBARISM

C H A P T E R - VI

SLAVO-TARTAR-BYZANTINE BARBARISM

A STUDY OF UNDER WESTERN EYES

Having finished The Secret Agent in 1907, Conrad began to work on Chance, but left it unfinished to work on a short story. Entitled 'Razumov', this story was to be "a contribution to and reading of the Russian character ... the very essence of things Russian, not the mere outward manners and customs but the Russian feeling and thought...."[1] In the same letter to Eric Pinker, his publisher, written on Jan. 7,1908, he maintains that the subject had long haunted him and that nothing of this sort had so far been attempted in English. In his letter to Galsworthy the previous day, he lays out the theme more elaborately. He gives the whole scheme of the plot and says: "I think that I am trying to capture the very soul of things Russian --

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[1] G.Jean Aubry, Life and Letters II, p.64.

cosas de Russia. It is not an easy work but it may be rather good when it is done...."[2] Of course, the original plot was drastically altered in the last part of the novel, and quite reasonably. It was too melodramatic to be considered as a serious work of art.

In some sense, Under Western Eyes may be regarded as a watershed in Conrad's literary career. It is the culmination of Conrad's mature thinking on a number of issues-- cultural, political and metaphysical -- that occupied him deeply through his life. The very phrase cosas de Russia' reminds us of Costaguana. Nostromo and Under Western Eyes are related to each other inasmuch as in both the novels Conrad explores the complexities of national characters and how they determine the fate of a nation. Both Costaguana and Russia are unusually large canvases, peopled with an extraordinary range of characters who play out the drama of fidelity and betrayal, allegiance and non-conformism. In both the cases, Conrad's diagnosis of the political and cultural ailments proved prophetic. The relation between The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes is much deeper. The latter is a continuation and an improvement upon the theme of the former. Under Western Eyes further explores the theme of anarchism and nihilism and their terrible and futile consequences. These were first taken up in

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[2]G.Jean Aubry, Life and Letters II, p.63.

The Secret Agent and given greater depth and complexity in Under Western Eyes. There are also thematic and structural similarities between Under Western Eyes and Lord Jim. Both the narratives are chronicles of guilt and atonement, of moral isolation and integration. In both the stories, an average man commits a fundamental act of betrayal and spends the rest of his life to redeem it. "The Secret Sharer," though outwardly a typical Conradian story about the sea, is also linked with Under Western Eyes, not only in its preoccupation with fidelity and betrayal but in its essence.

For an appropriate assessment of the cultural and political dimensions, Under Western Eyes must be read in conjunction with some of Conrad's non-fictional and autobiographical writings: Particularly important are the essays -- "Autocracy and War" and "Crime of Partition" contained in the book, Notes on Life and Letters. Written in 1905, "Autocracy and War"[3] contains Conrad's comprehensive denunciation of the 'moral corruption' that had overwhelmed Russia, an oppressed society where "the noblest aspirations of humanity, the desire of freedom, an ardent patriotism, the love of justice, the sense of pity, and even the fidelity of simple minds are prostituted to the lusts of hate and fear, the inseparable companion

[3]Joseph Conrad, "Autocracy and War", Notes on Life and Letters, p.83.

of an uneasy despotism."[4] Ostensibly a reflection on the progress of the Russo-Japanese war, in the essay Conrad makes a dispassionate survey of revolutions in different parts of the globe. He is extremely wary of mass movements that lead to mass hysteria; nevertheless, he acquiesces that revolutions are sometimes permissible in certain forms. He also believes that there are essential differences between the circumstances elsewhere in Europe and those in Russia :

> The revolutions of European states have never been in the nature of absolute protests en masse against the monarchical principle; they were the uprisings of the people against the oppressive degeneration of legality. But there never has been any legality in Russia, she is a negation of that as of everything else that has its roots in reason or conscience.[5]

He goes on to say that for any revolution to become really successful, it must be preceded by adequate intellectual groundwork. Unless the people are sufficiently prepared, no real benefit can accrue from revolution. For Conrad, the autocratic regime of Russia under the Tsars is not amenable to healthy change or evolution: "For the autocracy of holy Russia, the only possible self-reform is suicide."[6]

Inspite of his strong denunciations of the autocracy

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[4]Joseph Conrad, Under Western Eyes, (London:Penguin Books,1985), p.58. All references are to this edition.

[5]Notes on Life and Letters, p.101.

[6]Ibid.

in Russia, Conrad did not think of a peoplle's revolt with any enthusiasm. He knew that the only alternative left to the people of Russia is revolution; nevertheless, for him it was 'a word of dread as much as of hope'. This ambivalence is maintainted throughout the four parts of the novel. By the very nature of his genius, Conrad was incapable of seeing things in terms of crude generalisations. Hallowed by no tradition of popular governments and corrupt in its values, Russia is seen as having a past incapable of evolving new relevances :

> The same relentless fate holds in its grip the all-powerful ruler and his helpless people... the princes of Russia who in their heart of hearts had come in time to regard themselves as superior to every monarch of Europe, have never risen to be chiefs of a nation. Their authority has never been sanctioned by popular tradition, by ideas of intelligent loyalty, of devotion, of political necessity, of simple expediency, or even by the power of the sword. In whatever form of upheaval Autocratic Russia is to find her end, it can never be a revolution fruitful of moral consequence to mankind. It cannot be anything else but a rising of slaves.[7]

In the light of the above views held by Conrad, it was a very difficult task for him to write a novel on Russia. The very name of the land evoked memories that were acutely painful. "The obligation of absolute fairness was imposed on me heredetarily, by the peculiar

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[7] Notes on Life and Letters, p.102.

experience of race and family...."[8] says Conrad in the 'Author's Note' and the readers acqainted with Conrad's childhood may well realise how bitter those experiences were. From the account of the way he grappled with the narrative, it is evident that it was an ordeal for him to depict the characters and the scenes of the novel objectively, without giving way to his deep-seated rancour. Whatever objectivity he could achieve, was, at the cost of great mental tension which is evidenced by his total collapse when he finished the novel. Through every means -- rewriting of the manuscipts and deletion in them, he tried to divest the book of all imputable personal prejudices and maintain a sense of impartiality and generosity of opinion. The 'Author's Note' makes it clear: "My greatest anxiety was in being able to strike and sustain the note of scrupulous impartiality."[9] That Conrad deleted the name of Poland and even all references to it from the original manuscript testifies to his desire to make the story not a personal diatribe against Russia but a universal parable of the political and cultural emasculation of a people fated to live under the curse of an autocratic rule. He was concerned to recreate "not so much the political state as the psychology of Russia"[10] and that lifts

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[8] 'Author's Note', Under Western Eyes, p.50.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

the narrative from the strait-jacket of topicality and makes it a universal statement on the human situation.

Razumov is the symbol of isolation and suffering that was typical in the Tsarist atmosphere of pre-revolutionary Russia. *He leads a lonely and withdrawn life.* A man born without any political or family ties, Razumov is, as the author says, as lonely in the world as a man swimming in the deep sea. He wants to end his alienation and integrate himself to society by carving out a respectable career for himself. He is an ordinary youngman with a healthy capacity for work and sane ambition and conceives for himself a linear kind of development. By dint of sheer hard work, he wants to make a 'solid beginning' that would end his anonymity and pave the way for him to become 'a celebrated old Professor, decorated, possibly a privy councillor' :

> ... a celebrated Professor was a somebody. Distinction would convert the label Razumov into an honoured name... A man's real life is that accorded to him in the thoughts of other men by reason of respect or natural love.[11]

But Razumov's solitary existence is intruded upon by the uninvited confidence shown in him by Haldin, a fellow student and the assassin of the Minister-Presi dent. Razumov's orderly, routined existence is

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[11] Under Western Eyes, p.63.

thwarted by this intrusion of the unexpected. He is intelligent enough to realise that his private world of non-commitment and ambition has crumbled down the moment Haldin entered his room. Haldin was like the inexorable fate: "Fatality enters your rooms while your landlady's back is turned; you come home and find it bearing a man's name... you cannot shake it off anymore. It will cling to you forever."[12] Razumov's isolation from the discontent raging around him comes to an end. His conscious avoidance of involvement in the political struggle between reaction and revolution does not really save him. Rather, his cultivated neutrality and lack of ties mark him out, make him the obvious confidant for Haldin :

> It occured to me that you -- you have no one belonging to you -- no ties, no one to suffer for it if this came out by some means. There have been enough Russian ruined homes as it is.[13]

Both in the body of the text and the 'Author's Note', Conrad repeatedly emphasises Razumov's loneliness and isolation from any organic community: "The word Razumov was the mere label of a solitary individuality".[14] He has guarded his solitariness so far by alienating himself from the political unrest and emotional tension

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[12] Under Western Eyes, p.63.

[13] Ibid., p.67.

[14] Ibid., p.61.

of the time and keeping "an instinctive hold on normal, practical, everyday life."[15] He is guided primarily by the instincts of self-improvement and self-preservation. But into the fortress of his private world erupts absurdity in the form of Haldin. This absurdity is the claim of politics that impinges on the private life of each individual, however non-commital,in modern times. Henceforth any choice, in response to Haldin's confidence, is bound to be a political choice. And the choice is inescapable. In his conversation with Councillor Mikulin later in the narrative Razumov explicates the dilemma :

> What is a sober man can do, I should like to know? To cut oneself entirely from one's kind is impossible.... But if a drunken man runs out of the grog shop, falls on your neck and kisses you on both cheeks because something about your appearance has taken his fancy, what then -- kindly tell me? You may break, perhaps,a cudgel on his back and yet not succeed in beating him off.[16]

There are two mutually exclusive alternatives open to Razumov -- either to give Haldin up to the police or to help him escape and thus be implicated with him. Of course, he was fully aware of the consequences: "He was a Russian and for him to be implicated meant simply sinking into the lowest social depths among the hopeless

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[15] Under Western Eyes, p.60.

[16] Ibid., p.128.

and the destitute, the nightbirds of the city."[17] Razumov frantically debates the question in his mind and the whole debate is skilfully dramatised by Conrad in his trance-like journey to the 'vile den' of Ziemianitch. Though the ambiguity of his intention has been maintained so far, it is fairly clear that he wants to help Haldin out to escape. Otherwise he should have gone to the police first rather than to Ziemianitch. Nevertheless, his feelings at this stage are very tentative.

The 'gentleman' Razumov is revolted by the putrid atmosphere prevailing in the lowly eating house. He finds the people there stripped of their humanity. The company includes "a horrible,non-descript, shaggy being with a black face like the muzzle of a bear" and "a wet and bed-raggled creature, a sort of sexless and shivering scarecrow"[18] washing glasses over a wooden tub. The place is like some underground asylum for rats: "The house was an enormous slum, a hive of human vermin, a monumental abode of misery towering on the verge of starvation and despair."[19] This was Razumov's first contact with the 'people'. He is filled with disgust and nausea. For him, they are all 'brutes'. Razumov was told that Ziemianitch, 'the bright soul' of Haldin had

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[17] Under Western Eyes, p.72.

[18] Ibid., p.74.

[19] Ibid., p.75.

got his skinful early in the afternoon and had gone away "with a bottle under each arm to keep it up amongst the horses."[20] When Razumov finds him out, he is dead-drunk and cannot make him get up. The host sympathises with him and says, "who could bear life in our land without the bottle?"[21] When his kicks to wake Ziemianitch do not produce any desirable result, Razumov is suddenly filled with frenzied fury and belabours the 'brute' mercilessly. Ziemianitch, after showing signs of life, fell snoring again. Razumov feels utterly hopeless. The narrator's comment is revealing :

> Ziemianitch's passionate surrender to sorrow and consolation had baffled him. That was the people. A true Russian man. Razumov was glad he had beaten that brute, 'the bright soul' of the other. Here they were: the people and the enthusiast. Between the two he was done for. Between the drunkenness of the peasant incapable of action and the dream-intoxication of the idealist incapable of perceiving the reason of things and the true character of men.[22]

Razumov is torn between the desires to do right by Haldin and to preserve himself. The encounter with Ziemianitch was psychologically unsettling. For a split moment he thinks that he would kill Haldin and settle the matter once for all. But the vision of the corpse hanging about his neck dissuades him immediately. The

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[20] Under Western Eyes, p.74.

[21] Ibid., p.75.

[22] Ibid., p.77.

hallucinatory quality of the journey has been evoked by Conrad with deep psychological realism. Faced with the crisis, the 'naked terror' of his utter loneliness comes home to him. He even thinks of rushing back to Haldin, embracing him and his cause and thus creating "an incredible fellowship of the souls."[23] Razumov's mental crisis is further aggravated by the absence of any'moral refuge'. There is none who could share his feeling and understand his plight. He gets more and more desperate: "Razumov stamped his foot and received almost a physical impression of endless space and countless millions."[24] Next he has an epiphany in which he experiences a mystical identification with the historical fact of Russian autocracy: "like other Russian before him, Razumov, in conflict with himself, felt the touch of grace upon his forehead."[25]

Razumov thus moves slowly to the point of conversion. His mind passes judgement against Haldin. "Haldin means disruption", and his action inevitably point up towards chaos and instability. Razumov prefers the status quo to an era of chaos, uncertainty and lawlessness: "Better that thousands should suffer than that a people should become a disintegrated mass, helpless like dust in the wind. Obscurantism is better than the

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[23] Under Western Eyes, p.77.

[24] Ibid., p.78.

[25] Ibid., p.79.

light of incendiary torches."[26] In this state of mind Razumov meets Haldin's ghost. He is horrified and as soon as the hallucination is over, he decides to give Haldin up as if to get rid of the real man as much as his ghost. From the moment he decides to give Haldin up, his mind becomes alert and active. He goes to the house of Prince K, the only person he is attached to, however remotely. In going to prince K, he aligns himself with the ruling conservative and reactionary forces. But the irony lies in the fact that his alignment with these forces does not restore his former independence. Rather he gets more implicated. Right from the moment Prince K brings him to General T, he is treated as a suspect and interrogated accordingly. Though his role in the arrest of Haldin is kept a closely guarded secret because of his proximity with Prince K, the police do not leave him alone. General T has discovered that Razumov has the quality of inspiring confidence in people. This quality, combined with the belief of Haldin's comrades that he is one of them, lends itself to substantial political exploitation and must be used to reap maximum political benefit.

It is evident that Conrad does not invest Razumov with any explicit political ideology. His betrayal of Haldin is the result of a chain of circumstances and

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[26] Under Western Eyes, p.79.

psychological imperatives. However, it seems that through his readings, Razumov has made himself conversant with the liberal, historical tradition and democratic ideologies of the West and evolved for himself a system of belief that can be found in the following abbreviated statements :

> History not Theory
> Patriotism not Internationalism
> Evolution not Revolution
> Direction not Destruction
> Unity not Disruption[27]

Razumov's allegiance to the values posited in the left hand column above places him squarely on the side of General T and the status quo of which the assassinated Minister-President and Prince K are external symbols. Yet one feels that the conservative ideals mentioned above are a later rationalisation after the act of betrayal when Razumov is stung by a gnawing conscience. In an illuminating essay on Under Western Eyes, Tony Tanner argues that the real cause of Razumov's betrayal springs from a deep emotional need of human attachment and social integration :

> The father he had never really had represents the harmony of the established order, that great place of status and security into which he aspires to be admitted. Haldin, on the other hand, stands for 'horrible discord' not only in Russia but in Razumov's precariously maintained routine existence. In succumbing to the unspoken claim of his father

[27] Under Western Eyes, p.104.

> Razumov is following a profound emotional need. His subsequent conservative ideals are rationalisation.[28]

This emotional need is also voiced by Razumov himself when he tells Haldin: "You are a son, a brother, a nephew to no end of people. I am just a man."[29] All the same, his emotional needs are not satisfied. On the contrary, he is not only harassed by repeated official inquiries into his supposed complicity with Haldin, but is also deprived of peace of mind because of his own internal conflicts: "... everything abandoned him -- hope, courage, belief in himself, trust in men. His heart had, as it were, emptied itself. It was no use struggling on."[30] If he had a precarious existence before, he virtually reaches on 'rack' now.

Razumov's meeting with Councillor Mikulin are notable because of the frank discussion that took place between the two. Though Razumov constantly labours under the idea that he is being regarded as a police suspect, he puts forword his views with unusual vehemence. Now that he is embroiled into the schizophrenia of Russian political life, he shows the same tendencies. Proudly displaying himself before Mikulin as a 'thinker', Razumov swears by the name of sanity: "I did not hate him

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[28] "Nightmare and Complacency:Razumov and the Western Eye", Critical Quarterly, IV, 3 (1962), p.200.

[29] Under Western Eyes, p.100.

[30] Ibid., p.182.

because he had committed the crime of murder. I hated him simply because I am sane."[31] But Mikulin does not have much faith in Razumov's sanity. He tells Razumov that though now he is fully independent, he will inevitably come back to them -- "Some of our greatest mind had to do that in the end."[32] At the end of the 'comedy of persecution', Razumov expresses the earnest desire "to retire", to be left alone in peace. Mikulin finds no possibility of this. "An occurence of that sort marks a man"[33], he says. His inescapable question "where to?" rings with ominous forebodings. The inexorable quality of the political forces in Russia is epitomised in that tiny question. Razumov realises that he is permanently trapped.

The critical discussions on Under Western Eyes tend to bypass Haldin. No serious attempt has so far been made for a proper assessment of his character. Our impression of him is largely derived from Razumov's denunciations of him and the interest in him seems to consist chiefly in in the fact that he implicates Razumov. It should be pointed out that besides this unflattering portrait presented by Razumov, there is enough textual evidence to make the character stand on its own feet. Haldin's long conversation with Razumov before his arrest and the words put in the mouth of his mother and

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[31] Under Western Eyes, p.127.

[32] Ibid., p.283.

[33] Ibid., p.128.

sister in their conversation with the English Professor and Razumov go to build up a portrait which is comprehensive enough to deserve critical attention.

Haldin is drawn by Conrad as a man of 'lofty daring' and idealism. He endangers his own security and that of his family by plunging himself into revolutionary activities against the oppressors. He is not a theoretical or fancy revolutionary. He mixes closely with the poorest of the poor and the oppressed to empathise with them. To the destitutes of the 'vile den' he carries words of hope. Haldin's mother tells the narrator that he has a brilliant intellect, the most noble and unselfish nature and that he is the 'oracle' of his comrades. Before embarking on his mission of removing Mr. de P, he gives up his room and stops mixing with his comrades so that he does not implicate anyone. All this speaks of a mind capable of cool thinking and sound judgement. He makes it clear that he had no personal grudge against the Minister-President. He had to be removed because of his inhuman cruelty and ruthless extermination of all forces of revolution: "Three more years of his work would have put us fifty years back into bondage", he tells Razumov, "and look at all the lives wasted and all the souls lost in that time."[34]

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[34] Under Western Eyes, p.65.

Moved by the suffering of the people, he is compelled to do the 'weary Work' and feels totally drained out. He is horrified by his act; nevertheless, he thinks that he owed it to "the Russian soul that lives in all of us". Otherwise why, he asks Razumov, should he have done this, "reckless like a butcher -- in the middle of these innocent people -- scattering death -- I ... I wouldn't hurt a fly!"[35] And sitting down, he wept for a long time.

Though Conrad had little sympathy with romantic idealists or revolutionary enthusiasts, he invests Haldin with human warmth, dignity and respect. He is drawn to seek the aid of Razumov because he had great regard for the latter's sober thinking and cool judgement and trustfulness. He appeals to Razumov in the name of a 'brother', an epithet designed to cut across Razumov's isolation and establish a bond of fellowship. Haldin's absolute sincerity of purpose and trust in Razumov is revealed unequivocally in the following lines:

> You suppose that I am a terrorist now -- a destructor of what is. But consider that the true destroyers are they who destroy the spirit of progress and truth, not the avengers who merely kill the bodies of the persecutors of human dignity. Men like me are necessary to make room for self-contained, thinking men like you.[36]

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[35] Under Western Eyes, p.70.

[36] Ibid., pp.67-8.

Further, Haldin is not moved by any partisan or selfish motive. If he wants to save his life, it is not for himself: "It is not my life I want to save but my power to do. I wouldn't live idle."[37] Ironically, while Haldin is holding forth about his self-less dedication to the cause of the oppressed people, Razumov is preoccupied with the thought of saving his own skin.

When Razumov comes back supposedly after arranging for Ziemianitch's carriage, but really giving Haldin up to the police, he tries to nettle Haldin psychologically by openly denouncing his act of assassination : "And what can you people do by scattering a few drops of blood on the snow? On this Immensity. On this Unhappy Immensity"[38], cries Razumov, and for the first time Haldin realises that Razumov does not approve of his action. But his trust in Razumov does not erode: "You are a magnanimous soul, but my action is abhorrent to you"[39], he tells Razumov and feels a pang of conscience for implicating him by taking refuge in his room. But as readers, we know that Haldin's trust in Razumov is not culpable but Razumov's betrayal is. Razumov does not turn Haldin away, nor does he undeceive him till the act of betrayal has become an accomplished fact. The final compliment to Haldin comes from the narrator.

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[37] Under Western Eyes, p.68.

[38] Ibid., p.100.

[39] Ibid., p.101.

Inspite of his conservative distaste for revolution and revolutionaries in Russia, he is finally compelled to recognise that Haldin cannot be called a sinister conspirator; he was a 'pure enthusiast'.

Part One of Under Western Eyes concludes with Mikulin's unanswerable question. Part Two takes us back six months from the happenings of the first part. At the beginning of this part, Haldin's mother and sister are introduced to the readers by the English Professor of languages. Doubts have too often been expressed about the role of the English Professor as narrator, his so-called Western eyes through which events are seen and their significance interpreted. Several critics, notable among them C.B.Cox, find the Professor obtuse and unsatisfactory as a narrative intelligence :

> Conrad's use of the English teacher as a narrator is a most unsatisfactory device.... His insistence on his lack of imagination appears ridiculous because he recounts the tale with compelling force. The pretence that he is simply recording his memories wears thin, and we may wonder where this supposedly smug and impotent onlooker found his grasp of language and astute powers of artistic selection.[40]

On the other hand, a host of others have found the narrator quite useful. The fact is that Conrad in

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[40] C.B.Cox, Joseph Conrad:The Modern Imagination (London:J.M.Dent and Sons Ltd., 1974), p.104.

writing Under Western Eyes, was dealing with a subject very close to his heart and which evoked acutely painful and unpleasant memories. He had to take utmost precaution not to allow personal prejudices colour his judgement. It is in this light that the significance of the narrator is to be assessed. The English Professor as narrator was a convenient device to mute the strident personal resonances. It helped Conrad to put the narrative in a certain perspective. Conrad himself admits as much in the 'Author's Note'.

The novelist's intention becomes clear when we compare his controversial use of the narrator in Under Western Eyes with that of Marlow in Heart of Darkness or Lord Jim. Whereas Marlow is deeply interested in the fate of the protagonist and the world around him and has unshakable faith in work ethics, the language teacher is comparatively uninvolved and lacks dynamism. Fortified by an independent income and a conventional outlook, he leads an easy and uneventful life in Geneva. Marlow associates himself enthusiastically with the life and career of Jim and Kurtz and tries to help and understand them and is, to some extent, transformed by his unusual experiences; the language teacher is nonchalant and continually pretends incomprehension. Eventhough he is a sympathetic friend to Natalia and offers her some kind of emotional

support at the time of crisis, he takes a dislike to Razumov at the first sight (the aversion was mutual) and makes no effort to understand his plight. It is obvious that the function of the English narrator is not to interpret the significance of events but to present a particular point of view.

The narrator is baffled by the endemic cynicism displayed by most of the Russian characters and locates it in the political environment of Russia: "For that is the mark of Russian autocracy and Russian revolt. In its pride of numbers, in its strange pretensions of sanctity, and in the secret readiness to abase itself in suffering, the spirit of Russia is the spirit of cynicism."[41] The Russian official's disregard for truth and Natalia's lack of concern for intelligibility baffles him equally. The Russians' extraordinary love of words puzzles him. In the cases of both Haldin and Razumov, moments of crucial action are always accompanied by cynical gestures or mystical effusions. At one moment Razumov equates Russianness with cynicism: "We are Russians, that is children, that is sincere; that is -- cynical."[42]

Conrad makes it clear that the cynicism discussed

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[41] Under Western Eyes, p.123.

[42] Ibid., p.214.

above is a by-product of centuries of oppression that obliterated all hope for a better future. The oppressors and the oppressed alike are the victims of this inexorable historical fact. Both in this novel and the essays, Conrad has shown that civilised values of democracy and human rights have always been tainted in Russia. Individual Russians were not allowed to imbibe the democratic values that should be their birthright as a social being. Jacques Berthoud has explored this particular aspect and points out :

> The interdependence of the individual and the community on which rationality depends presupposes one essential condition: that the individual should be free to commit himself to his community in the expectation that the community will respect the freedom without which obligation cannot exist.... Under Tsarist autocracy, however, obligation is replaced by coercion and the integrity of the community is destroyed.[43]

When the organic link between the individual and the community on the one hand and the people and the government on the other, is destroyed, the state and the people draw violently apart. The only possible weapon that remains in the hands of the state is coercion and for the individual the only recourse is either abject submission or violent revolt. Conrad's views were unequivocal on this: "The ferocity and imbecility of an

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[43]Jacques Berthoud, Joseph Conrad:The Major Phase (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press,1978), p.166.

autocratic rule rejecting all legality and in fact basing itself upon complete moral anarchism provokes the no less imbecile and atrocious answer of a purely utopian revolutionism encompassing destruction by the first means to hand ...."[44] Haldin as much as Razumov on the one hand, and General T on the other, are the natural product of the same autocratic regime.

The members of the 'la petite Russie' in Geneva are also the product of this regime. They may be regarded as testcases indicating what peculiar transformation human beings are capable of when they are compelled to live under the yoke of ruthless autocracy. In Peter Ivanovitch, the Russian autocracy threw up a revolutionary of grotesque proportions. A megalomaniac fraud, he is conceived on a grand scale and treated with barely concealed irony and contempt. The life-story of this 'Russian Mazzini' is the stuff that modern day bestseller thrillers are made of. The account of his transformation from convict to revolutionary makes for a stirring tale of adventures that is extremely fascinating and that made him famous throughout Europe. Conrad invests him with savage physical features, a love for the bombast, and a vulgarly exhibitionist style of life that sharply undercut his image of

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[44] 'Author's Note', Under Western Eyes, p.51.

a sincere revolutionist. He has got his worthy companion in Madame de S, an aristocratic lady of questionable antecedents. "Once upon a time the intriguing wife of a now dead and forgotten diplomat"[45], she is the ostentatious symbol of Ivanovitch's 'cult of the woman'. His 'burly black-coated figure' with his shapeless hairy face, his dark glasses and his bull neck can be seen esconced in a big landau opposite 'that heavily made-up, long-waisted, glassy-eyed' lady in a pose of stunning ostentation. Their life-style is totally at variance with their proclaimed commitment. Peter Ivanovitch's cult of feminism does not conceal his perversion (There are suggestions of an obscene liaison between him and Madame de S) and his will to power. His inhuman exploitation of Tekla makes nonsense of his professed principles. Chateau Borel, the citadel of the revolutionists, is ruled over by Madame de S and Peter Ivanovitch. The villa smacks of shady goings-on and squalid plots and counterplots. A little uneasy in the world of ideas, Peter Ivanovitch's motto is to 'spiritualise' them and make people fanatics because, according to him, "Faith alone won't do."[46] Like Lucifer,he tempts Natalia to his cult because he needs someone to preach, instruct and guide. When Natalia,

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[45] Under Western Eyes, p.150.

[46] Ibid., p.219.

in her conversation with Peter Ivanovitch expresses doubt as to the credentials of Madame de S, he quickly disarms her by his eloquent remark -- "She is the perpetual manifestation of a noble and peerless spirit."[47] Eventually this'noble spirit' turns out to be a vulgar occulist whom Peter Ivanovitch cultivates solely for the money she supplies.

However, unlike the hollow band of anarchists drawn under the wing of Verloc in The Secret Agent, the the members of 'la petite Russie' in Geneva are invested with a certain complexity and depth. Peter Ivanovitch and Nikita("The killer of the largest number of gendarmes")[48] are extreme cases. Between these two extremes of the revolutionary spectrum, there are those like Tekla and Sophia Antonovna who do credit to the otherwise sinister set of nihilists. Along with Natalia, Tekla brings with her the qualities of compassion and service to the suffering humanity which give Under Western Eyes a unique dimension among the major novels of Conrad. As R.A.Gekoski points out: "Tekla and Natalia Haldin refuse to be defined by allegiance to any political creed. It is through his association with these two women that Razumov finally achieves redemption and escapes from his 'rack'."[49] Tekla is a

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[47] Under Western Eyes, p.154.

[48] Ibid., p.198.

[49] R.A.Gekoski, Conrad:The Moral World of the Novelist, p.168.

non-conformist to the core. She rejected the life of indignity and petty intrigue led by her father and employed herself like the Mother Teresa of our time, in bringing solace to the downtrodden and the destitute. Her life with the journeyman lithographer further opened her eyes to the inhuman oppression of the Tsarist regime. It is her intimate contact with suffering rather than any pretentious ideology that impels her to join hands with the forces that were supposedly trying to abolish tyranny and oppression. But after having worked for Peter Ivanovitch for several years, she has begun to abhor him. It must have been a cruel disappointment to her to discover what depths of cruelty and deceit this 'heroic fugitive' is capable of. In her talk with Natalia, Tekla makes a clean breast of everything, presumably to save the girl from the spell of Peter Ivanovitch. "Oh these geniuses!", she bursts out in scorn, and when Natalia asks if she is no longer a republican, she says meaningfully,- "After taking down Peter Ivanovitch from dictation for two years, it is difficult for me to be anything."[50]

The best in Tekla comes out when she meets Razumov. With instinctive sympathy she is drawn to Razumov when his heart was being spilled over with bitterness, remorse and anguish. Peter Ivanovitch and

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[50] Under Western Eyes, p.168.

Madame de S have brought her to such a pitiable state that she hungers for common human decency. She is moved when Razumov shows courtesy to her. Moreover, she is drawn to him because of his supposed strength to deal with monsters of oppression: "You kill the monsters! You have done a great deed."[51] She has suffered and suppressed her feelings for such a long time that she can hardly restrain the violence of her speech : "Great men are horrible!"[52] Her passionate plea that all these people with names must be done away with speaks of the bitterness accumulated in her mind.

Tekla asks Razumov to allow her to be with him whenever he is sick, in misery or distress. Razumov was surprised at the spectacle of her unquestioning devotion and dedication. He is drawn to her by her unabashed devotion to him and we find them slowly moving towards that 'domestic tradition' the absence of which Razumov deplored in his talk with Haldin. And when Razumov is truly rendered a cripple physically by the grotesque brutality of Nikita, Tekla immediately comes to his side and tends him unweariedly "with the pure joy of unselfish devotion."[53] True to her original instincts, she finds her salvation not in the world of revolutionary intrigue, but in the ideal of service to the suffering humanity.

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[51] Under Western Eyes, p.237.
[52] Ibid., p.236.
[53] Ibid., p.347.

The other significant revolutionary in Geneva is Sophia Antonovna. Admirably drawn by Conrad, she is the finest portrait of a revolutionary in the whole gamut of Conrad's political portraits. In fact the monstrosity of the political set in Geneva is offset, to a certain extent, by the presence of this revolutionary woman. Her initiation into the world of revolution, like that if Tekla, is a result of her intimate contact with suffering. From the day she had opened her eyes to the world, she saw her father slog and toil at the service of his superior masters without any protection or a word of encouragement. Even the simple joys of life, 'the birthright of the humblest' were robbed from him by the injustice of a society that totally dehumanised him. Sophia Antonovna gives an account of the climactic moment in the following touching lines :

> It was like a lurid light in which I stood, still almost a child, cursed not the misery that had been his lot, but the great social iniquity of the system resting on unrequited toil and unpitied suffering. From that moment I was a revolutionist.[54]

With astonishing perspicacity she analyses the quality of life in Russia. "You have either to rot or burn",[55] she tells Razumov; she would burn rather than rot.

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[54] Under Western Eyes, p.257.

[55] Ibid., p.248.

Sophia Antonovna is a totally dedicated soul. She can think of no other life but one which is hallowed by an enduring sacrifice. "One is ashamed of being left", she refers to Haldin's death and then says heroically,- "And what is death? At any rate, it is not a shameful thing like some kinds of life!"[56] She has a far deeper understanding of the revolutionary political process and the complexity of the situation in which they are enmeshed, than anyone else in the novel. She has moved beyond the stage of convenient generalisations and glittering platitudes. When Razumov seeks to characterise her as a 'materialist' and quotes Cabanis at her, she dismisses him instantly by saying -- "My dear soul,I have outlived all that nonsense."[57] Embittered against the general run of revolutionists, Razumov is humbled by the manifestation of her invincible spirit of revolt:

> Razumov looked at her white hair; and this mark of so many uneasy years seemed nothing but a testimony to the invincible vigour of revolt... in her revolutionary pilgrimage she had discovered the secret, not of everlasting youth, but of everlasting endurance.[58]

If Tekla and Natalia bring compassion to Razumov, Sophia Antonovna brings clear-eyed knowledge. She

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[56] Under Western Eyes, p.256.

[57] Ibid., p.249.

[58] Ibid., p.258.

sees revolutionists as human beings endowed with human failings. Her analysis of Rzumov's temptation and 'fall' and her immediate recognition that, "There is character in such a discovery"[59] betokens her readiness to understand and forgive and appreciate whatever is good in man. When the narrator meets her last in the novel, she is just back from another of her innumerable journeys through Russia, her revolutionary vigour still intact. She has visited Razumov, as she often does, on her way. In her view, he has redeemed himself fully and now legitimately deserves the respect of all true revolutionists.

The discussions between Natalia and the English Professor invite scrutiny because they contain some of Conrad's mature cogitations on different aspect of revolution and revolutionists. Standing in the midst of widespread repression and unrest, and inspite of great personal loss, Natalia does not lose faith in the possibility of a hopeful future. She thinks that all conflicts will finally be resolved though the necessary price will have to be paid. The Professor warns her against the way revolutions are taken over by extremists, opprtunists and charlatans. The enlightened may start a revolution but can never possibly guard against the prostitution of the noble cause by the intrusion of unwanted elements :

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[59] Under West n Eyes, .348.

> The last thing I want to tell you is this: in a real revolution -- not a simple dynastic change or a mere reform of institutions ... in a real revolution the best charcters do not come to the front. A violent revolution falls into the hands of narrow-minded fanatics and of tyrannical hypocrites at first. Afterwards comes the turn of all the pretentious intellectual failures of the time. Such are the chiefs and the leaders...[60]

It seems that for once Conrad has decided to come out of his facade of the western eyes and speak in the unequivocal Conradian voice. The narrator's summation of the revolutionary processes is as relevant today as it was in the pre-revolutionary Russia.

Natalia's vision of the future is an all-inclusive one. She is more than aware that the contemporary history of Russia bristles with pain, suffering, anger and unrest. But she, with her 'clear-eyed simplicity' looks beyond that: "I must own that I shall never give up looking forward to the day when all discord shall be silenced."[61] On the face of it, such idealism may sound naive and even sentimental, but such vigorous optimism was, perhaps, necessary to offset the bleak despair evoked by different characters and situations in the novel. Moreover, as Natalia elaborates on her dream of future concord and justice, we realise that she is

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[60] Under Western Eyes, p.293.

[61] Ibid., p.346.

not blind to the enormous losses in terms of human lives and intellectual potential that the revolution will exact. As for herself, she is ready to dedicate her present life "sharing her compassionate labours between the horrors of over-crowded jails, and the heart-rending misery of bereaved homes."[62] Her faith rests ultimately on the great power of love, on the ideal of fidelity to certain values in which Conrad, for all his scepticism never stopped believing. Conrad seems to have outgrown some of his pervasive scepticism as he conjures up, through Natalia, a vision of the future essentially optimistic: "... an invincible belief in the advent of loving concord springing like a heavenly flower from the soil of men's earth, soaked in the blood, torn by struggles, watered with tears."[63]

However, the most significant function of Natalia in Under Western Eyes is to help Razumov towards his redemption. When we meet Razumov in Part Two, we see a strange, haunted figure overwhelmed by his sense of guilt. He is temperamentally unsuited for his assumed role of a double agent. He seems to be parched, suffocating and suffering terribly in his mind. His sense of guilt becomes more acute when he meets Natalia.

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[62] Under Western Eyes, p.346.

[63] Ibid., p.187.

With absolute trustfulness and child-like dependence, she looks up to him for guidance. Ironically, she attributes Razumov's lack of warmth and communication to his depth of feeling. "I have told you my opinion that he is a man of deep feeling", she tells the narrtor. She thinks that the death of Haldin must have affected Razumov deeply: "Their friedship must have been the brotherhood of souls."[64] Her absolute faith in him intensifies his sense of guilt to an unprecedented level. She is like a mirror in which Razumov sees his ugly face. Hungering for trust and affection, Razumov comes across Natalia's "noble trustfulness... foreign to every meanness"[65] and cannot but fall in love with her. But being what he is, to allow himself to deceive her will amount to 'stealing' her soul, committing a greater outrage than his betrayal of Haldin. Unable to fulfil any of his assumed roles, his life becomes a torment to him. Eventually he decides to throw away all disguises and confess. His love for her makes him give her up and betray himself. This is his first step towards redemption and reintegration.

Under Western Eyes continually dramatises the tension between the Slav and the Western cultures. The Western eyes behold with amazing incomprehension the

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[64] Under Western Eyes, p.197.

[65] Ibid.

drama that is being played out on the Russian soil and abroad in Geneva. The narrator frequently reiterates his belief that no Westerner can fathom the perverse mystery of Russian character :

> This is a Russian story for Western ears, which as I have observed already, are not attuned to certain tones of cynicism and cruelty, of moral distress already silenced at our end of Europe.[66]

Europe and Russia are conceived as two counterpoints in the novel. The enlightenment of the one puts in sharp focus the darkness of the other. Though Conrad's claim that Europe has totally silenced the irrational tendencies of cynicism and cruelty sounds gratuitous, particularly in the light of the pervasive nihilism in The Secret Agent, the point here is the absence of any affinity between the two cultures. Over the years, Europe has evolved a culture based on the democratic principles of liberty, human dignity and freedom. Russia is presented to us as a country that lacks any such tradition. It has nothing in the past to build on, nor its present holds out any hope for the future :

> ... Under the shadow of autocracy, nothing could grow. Russian autocracy succeeded to nothing: it had no historical past and it cannot hope for a historical future. It

[66] Under Western Eyes, p.75.

can only end.[67]

In his 1905 essay, "Autocracy and War" Conrad had already distinguished between the social and political processes in Europe and those in Russia. Russia had studiously shut herself against the 'ideological contamination' of Europe, and conducted herself in a way that refused to recognise that the world had come a long way from its medieval mores. This ideological difference between Europe and Russia increased so much that it became virtually unbridgeable: "A yawning chasm opens between East and West"[68], says Conrad in the same essay. The Russians even in the first decades of the twentieth century were compelled to live under a kind of political tyranny that was unthought of in Europe. Conrad calls this remorseless political conditioning a 'bottomless abyss'-- an abyss that has "swallowed up every hope of mercy, every aspiration towards personal dignity, towards freedom, towards knowledge, towards every ennobling desire of the heart, every redeeming whisper of conscience."[69] The words 'chasm' and 'abyss' signify the intensity of Conrad's aversion to Russia, for in Conrad's mind, these are the epithets-

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[67] Under Western Eyes, p.97.

[68] Notes on Life and Letters, p.100.

[69] Ibid.

reserved for ultimate tragic apprehension. The English narrator's seemingly trivial statement that "it is unthinkable that any young Englishman should find himself in Razumov's position"[70] becomes resonant with meaning and highlights the enormity of the 'cultural divide' between Russia and Europe.

Here it will be appropriate to recall that Conrad thought himself to be a European in a broader sense and his culture that of Europe. He regarded Poland as a part of Western Europe, both ideologically and culturally. According to him, the Poles have no affinity with the Russians and are immune from the 'Slavo-Tartar-Byzantine barbarism' of the Russians. He reacted strongly on several occasions when his friend Edward Garnett and other reviewers and critics of his books used the epithet 'Slav' to identify him and complimented his penetration of the Slav mind. Any identification with Russia infuriated him and he vehemently denied having anything to do with that land and its culture. It is in this context that the "Western eyes" seem to be much more Conrad's own than those of the English Professor of languages. He identified himself with the conservative tolerance and liberal cultural tradition of Europe so much so that Russia seemed to him

[70] Under Western Eyes, p.118.

a pre-historic land of ghosts and goblins, genii and tyrants. One may remember his hatred of Dostoevsky, and the reason for his hatred is illuminating : "... I don't know what D(ostoevsky) stands for or reveals, but I do know that he is too Russian for me. It sounds to me like some fierce mouthings from pre-historic ages."[71] In the novel Under Western Eyes, the narrator symbolises the puzzlement of the West at the primitiveness of Russian natures. The analytical mind of the narrator cannot fathom the half mystical utterances of either Haldin or Razumov. When faced with crisis, the Russians display an extra-ordinary love of words. Natalia Haldin, though generally very lucid, also displays her illogicality and lack of concern for intelligibility. Peter Ivanovitch and Madame de S want to get away from facts by 'spiritualising' them. Indeed, one can find little logic or rational analysis in the whole of the Russian world in Under Western Eyes.

Under Western Eyes, the last of Conrad's major political novels is distinguished by a maturity and mellowness in Conrad's thinking on revolutionary politics, the cultural conditioning of Russia and other related issues, rarely to be found elsewhere. It has become a metaphor of the predicament of the modern man in oppressive political environments.

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Chapter-VII

CONCLUSION

C H A P T E R - VII

CONCLUSION

Conrad is generally regarded as a writer of ambivalence, of double vision. Quite appropriately he describes himself as a 'homo duplex'. His works defy any categorisation. The traditional method of putting him under any rubrics, to regard him as a writer of romances and stirring tales of adventures at sea has long been discarded. It has been pointed out in the foregoing chapters that in Conrad's major works there is no conclusive resolution of meanings. In the so-called political novels, this tentativeness is markedly evident. They may prove to be both unequivocal assaults on imperialism as well as a projection of an idealistic impulse to it.

Conrad perceived the world dualistically and gave voice to the interaction of antagonistic forces. Conradian universe eschews obvious political and

cultural alternatives. It accepts the validity of irreconcilable attitudes. It is this extraordinarily complex and modern sensibility that I have tried to project through the analysis of the cultural and political dimensions of his major novels. His major novels are essentially battlegrounds for contending forces. These forces are not only metaphysical but also, and sometimes predominantly, political and cultural. In the course of discussion it has been shown how people belonging to different cultures and societies clashed with each other. Conrad's attitude of ambivalence is evident in his depiction of these societies and cultures. His aloofness and his lack of commitment to any particular cultural and political ideology create a tension in which facts are held up for observation and scrutiny. Conrad deliberately frustrates any attempt to arrive at unequivocal conclusions. One is not always sure where his sympathies lie.

In Almayer's Folly Conrad depicts a native society which is that of Borneo and which is still in a primitive state. The advent of the Europeans create a slight tremor in the social fabric and its reverberations assume some significance. Almayer who is Dutch marries a native woman but cannot develop even an

imperfect understanding with her. Their daughter Nina, a half-caste, is haunted by an acute identity crisis. The conflict in the novel boils down to a relatively simple antithesis of black and white. Neither the European nor the native society could give Nina any moorings or a sense of belonging. Almayer's pretensions to a superior culture sound hollow and do not stand him in stead. His gradual but steady deterioration from indolence to opium to imbecility serves as an adequate commentary on the fate of those who turn a blind eye to the conflicting demands that are required to be taken into account when people of different cultures and persuasions meet and mingle and interact with each other. In fact, Almayer's colonial upbringing is at the root of his gross confusion of his values. Nina's tensions symbolise the traumatic disorientation of half-caste children in colonial societies. Towards the conclusion of the novel we are told that she has given birth to a child and there is universal rejoicings in the kingdom of Bali. Obviously Nina is happy. The native society has accepted and integrated her in a way which the European society could never have done.

The same racial antithesis and confusion of values

are at work in An Outcast of the Islands as well. Socially and culturally, Willems and Aissa are as widely different as the 'civilised' Europe and the 'primitive' East. They have nothing in common except an irresistible passion for each other. Willems is hopelessly attracted to Aissa but does not know what he can do with such a strange creature. The communication gap between them is so wide that one's most natural feelings and actions seem irrational and repulsive to the other. Mutual fascination and frantic possessiveness last only for a short period at the end of which both of them fall violently apart. Willems tries to get away from Aissa and all that is associated with her; but he cannot. When his former wife appears on the scene, the final die is cast and Aissa, perilously on the edge of mental equilibrium, shots Willems dead. There is also deep mistrust between the Europeans and the natives. The establishment of a meaningful rapport between them is always hindered by the enormous gulf created by unknown cultures and civilisations.

The native community in Heart of Darkness is more primitive than in Almayer's Folly. Nature, as depicted in this work is, as it were, primordial. Marlow's journey seemed to him to be a journey to the

beginning of things, 'when vegetation rioted and the big trees were kings'. Here there is no attempt at communication between individuals and not much of social interaction. The Europeans in Heart of Darkness have no other business except to loot and plunder. Inspite of their professed commitment to social development and cultural enlightenment, there were scenes of devastation everywhere. The Europeans alienated the natives from their deep communal bonds and made them rootless. The natives are presented, except in two or three rare cases, as mere automatons, as some tools necessary for the furtherance of the machinery of European exploitation. The worship of Kurtz, the hollow man, by the natives is indicative of the enormous gulf between their level of civilisation and culture and his. It is due to the essential Conradian ambivalence that Kurtz appears to be both an emissary of science and progress and a colossal degenerate. Kurtz's fault lies in his accepting for himself of a standard that denies human limitations and abandoning the discipline, the responsibilities and requirements of the civilisation he came from. In carrying the imperial exploitation to its furthest extreme, Kurtz demonstrates the absurdity of responsibilities and

restraints which imperialism, political or economic, proclaims as a matter of policy.

Heart of Darkness and An Outpost of Progress records a complex of intellectual attitudes and responses to the colonial experience. The scathing irony permeating through both the works questions the notion of benevolent imperialism. Marlow was carried away by Kurtz's magniloquence , but the call to the universal holocaust makes his hair stand on end and illuminates the whole imperial situation in a flash. In the same way the merits of the Europeans and their ostensible benevolence are severely qualified on all occasions.

Conrad composed Nostromo on almost an epic scale. It is different from the earlier works in its greater canvas, its multitude of characters and in its view of an economic and historical determinism. Its treatment of both public and private life is perspicuous. It records the intrusion of capitalism and industrialism in a predominantly underdeveloped society and dramatises the inevitable conflict between tradition and technology, deep communal bonds in a rural culture and the uniformity and anonymity of industrial-urban proletarian life. Conrad's achievement lies in the

fact that he could anticipate with amazing accuracy the notion of economic imperialism and the consequent human exploitation it would entail. 'Material interests' which is Conrad's term for economic imperialism lie at the centre of the novel dominating the lives of almost all the central characters. It serves as a convenient peg around which Conrad weaves a complex pattern of human folly, greed and erosion of decent values. In the final analysis, Nostromo is about the advent of industry and democracy in a country inadequately prepared for it. Political regimes in Costaguana change with astonishing rapidity. It could have as many as four governments in six years. This entails shifting of loyalties by politicians and military generals, all in the name of liberty and democracy, though in fact for personal power and wealth. The native culture was in a fluid state and could not develop any mature or comprehensive political sense and appreciation of national problems around which debates and discussions could take place. The result is a brand of politics brazenly opportunistic and short-sighted.

Mrs. Gould is saddened by the vision of a Costaguana stripped of its native culture and tradition.

She wants to preserve the 'beautiful and pictureque things' in it, but does not know how to resolve the conflict between tradition and technology. Both she and Chales reopened the mine with the assumption that material progress is the first pre-requisite of an equitable social order. Conrad subjects this nineteenth century myth to searching scrutiny in Nostromo through a powerful analysis of the dynamics of power and politics in Costaguana. By the end of the novel the myth is totally exploded. We, along with the Goulds, discover that there is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests because they have their own laws which are amoral and inhuman.

The Secret Agent marks Conrad's excursion into unknown terrains -- a departure from his usual world of adventures at sea and cultural and political conflict in underdeveloped societies. The world of The Secret Agent is one of terrorism, anarchism, secret espionage and doublecross. Verloc, the secret agent, is a man of uncertain foreign extraction and dubious antecedents. Though he has been in London for eleven years in the pay-roll of a foreign power, Verloc is, in fact, a double agent. He is simultaneously in the confidence of the anarchists and a police informer.

The foreign embassy pays him regularly and yet he is paid and protected by the London police. Ideologically, Verloc is committed to neither side. He is a double agent because he has discovered that he can make a comfortable living for himself and his family by playing the two contending parties against each other -- fostering radical activities while generating reactionary fears.

Verloc's cohorts are a bunch of ineffectual anarchists--- Alexander Ossipon, Karl Yundt and the Professor. They have widely divergent views. The only bond that binds them is that all of them, except the Professor, are lazy and parasitic depending on the conventions and normality of ordinary social life they condemn. Conrad's portrayal of the anarchists as futile and hollow people reinforces the impression of futility and impotence of anarchism as a movement. However, The Secret Agent is a searching scrutiny of the fissures not only in political sphere, but in the social and domestic spheres as well. Conrad depicts London as another heart of darkness with its shabbiness, vulgarity and flagrant social injustice. He lambasts the bourgeois pretension to civilisation and culture through the characters of Vladimir, Winnie, Stevie and

Mrs. Neale. The politico-cultural vision projected in the novel is essentially bleak and despairing. This is due to the fact that not a single character shows any real concern for social justice or any sincere commitment to any ideology.

Under Western Eyes remains by far Conrad's most significant achivement. It is distinguished by a maturity and mellowness in Conrad's thinking on revolutionary politics, the cultural conditioning of Russia and other related matters. Conrad's proposed object in the novel is to present not so much the political state as the psychology of Russia. Razumov is the symbol of isolation and suffering that was inevitable in the Tsarist atmosphere of pre-revolutionary Russia. He wants to end his alienation and integrate himself to the Russian society by distinguishing himself as a Professor and by a studied avoidence of political movements that were raging against the Tsardom. But Razumov's isolation is intruded upon by the uninvited confidence shown in him by Haldin, the assassin of Mr. de P. Though Razumov betrays Haldin, he is hopelessly implicated and cannot shake himself free. The police as well as the revolutionists want to exploit him against each other and Razumov, by sheer force of circumstances,

becomes a double agent. Predictably, Razumov is unable to fulfil any of his assumed roles and rendered a cripple by the grotesque brutality of Nikita, the dreaded revolutionary, for his frank and courageous confession. The revolutionists in the novel possess a certain depth and complexity. The portrait of Tekla and Sophia Antonovna have been drawn by Conrad with remarkable delicacy and political insight.

In many of his preoccupations, Conrad was ahead of his times. In his critical awareness of the fissures in the nineteenth century ethos, he anticipated many twentieth century preoccupations. That is why while there is mounting impatience with many of his contemporary writers today, Conrad reveals an evergrowing relevance. Modern readers discover with pleasant surprise a great deal in him that is significant in the present state of humanity. Modern writers, for instance, George Orwell, Arthur Koestler, Milan Kundera, Graham Greene, V.S.Naipaul etc., have recognised their debt to Conrad. The new areas of enquiry in Conrad may be -- a study of his handling of English language and an exploration of his expatriate sensibility with reference to some of the expatriate writers of today.

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Nostromo	1904
The Mirror of the Sea	1906
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A Set of Six	1908
Under Western Eyes	1911
'Twixt Land and Sea	1912
Chance	1912
Victory	1914
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